

A Study on Translation Strategies of News English from the Perspective of Skopos Theory

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Abstract: As an excellent vehicle for dissemination of information, news has a huge impact on the way people live, promoting cultural exchange and mutual understanding to a large extent. Considering that, it means a lot for us to make a good job of news translation in an unbiased, objective and accurate way. Compared with traditional theories of translation laying great stress on equivalence, the skopos theory proposed by the German functionalism is perceived as a major breakthrough, which provides rock solid support for the translation of practical types of writing like news. The paper first introduces the skopos theory, then focuses on linguistic features of news English, and finally cites a few specific examples to work out some appropriate translation strategies for news English under the guidance of skopos theory, thus helping news translators gain a good deal of enlightenment.

1. Introduction

In the Internet age when a rich vein of information is available, news remains an indispensable part of people's lives. What's more, with increasingly regular cultural exchanges between China and the rest of the world, English news has become an effective means to keep our Chinese informed of current events abroad. Given its popularity, news translation now carries considerable weight in this field. Stella Sorby, a journalist who had worked in China for twelve years, discussed the use of complimentary and derogatory terms in the English to Chinese news translation by means of some specific examples and a small-scale experiment [1]. Esperanca Bielsa and Susan Bassnett published the book 'Translation in Global News', studying news translation practices in the context of globalization [2]. Recent findings suggest that more research is needed, especially those concerning the integration of theory with translation practice. The paper aims to look at available translation strategies for news English under the guidance of skopos theory. Getting support from this theory, the author cites a few news translation examples from the Chinese website of the New York Times to discuss such effective translation strategies as amplification, omission, literal translation, free translation, division and corresponding translation. The paper shows that skopos theory really helps translators adopt appropriate translation strategies based on the linguistic features of news English and its target audience.

2. Vermeer's Skopos Theory

The skopos theory, arising in Germany in the late 1970s, is at the core of German Functionalist Approaches. Skopos is a Greek word for “aim” or “purpose” and is introduced into translation theory in the 1970s by Hans J. Vermeer as a technical term for the purpose of a translation and of the action of translating [3].

The purpose of translation is of paramount importance because it determines the translation strategies and methods that a translator may employ. This is the first rule of skopos theory, the so-called skopos rule. Placing “the purpose of translation” as the core, the theory takes into account the multilateral relationship between the original author, the translator, and the target reader [4]. There are, in addition, two subsidiary rules: the coherence rule and the fidelity rule. Coherence rule means intra-textual coherence within the original text, that is, logical in itself and perfectly accessible to target readers. Fidelity rule means inter-textual coherence between the source text (ST) and the target text (TT) in terms of content and form. Later, Christiane Nord expounded her views on text analysis in translation and then put forward the function plus loyalty theory, an improved version of the skopos theory. Thus it can be seen that the skopos theory frees people from the bonds of “equivalence” highly prized in traditional translation theories. Such a shift indicates that the translation theory has come to notice the functional and sociocultural aspects of translation theories [5]. By doing so, the skopos theory brings a brand-new perspective to translation studies.

3. Linguistic Features of News English

To provide timely, efficient and objective news and information to the public, the English news discourse structure is tight compact with plain and economical wording and highly concentrated information [6]. Having a sound grasp of some linguistic features of news English will do you the power of good when it comes to the translation of news English. In the following part, the linguistic features of news English are subsumed under two categories, that is, lexis and syntax.

3.1. At Lexical Level

3.1.1. Neologism

In the wake of developments in science and technology, there are an increasing number of cultural exchanges among countries. Hence, a lot of new words are springing up like mushrooms, such as Bitcoin, dudevorce, crowd-funding, hiberdating, bromance, staycation, clickbait, cellfish, bridezilla, etc. Neologisms keep appearing and a better understanding of them helps learners command English language, gain necessary information, and cultivate their cross cultural communication ability [7].

Being responsive to new things, news media pave the way for the spread of new words. Journalists often incorporate new words into headlines as a way to attract readers' attention and maintain newspapers' circulation. For example, the buzzword “loneliness economy” appears in the headline “Loneliness economy prospers in China”; the new term “mpox”, a synonym for monkeypox, is used in the headline “WHO says mpox still remains a global public health emergency”; in the headline “God's pronouns are causing conniptions in Britain”, the word “conniption” is a new word derived from “captious”, meaning a state of extreme excitement or anger. On balance, news media help popularize those new words in simple form but with varied meanings. Meanwhile, the arrival of buzzwords refreshes our language, enriches news vocabulary and keeps news up to date with the latest trends.

3.1.2. Abbreviation

Journalists prefer the use of abbreviations in news reports. An abbreviation means a shortened form of a phrase, composed of the initials of each word without altering the meaning. There are a large number of well-known abbreviations such as ABM (Anti-Ballistic Missile), MFN (Most Favored Nation), API (Air Pollution Index), KPI (Key Performance Indicator), B2C (Business to Consumer) and CPTPP (Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership).

In the press, the use of abbreviations can make news reports both rich in content and succinct in style. For example, in the sentence “Among 31 African countries analysed by the OECD, a rich-country group, only Nigeria collects less tax as a percentage of GDP,” two abbreviations are quite familiar to people: one is OECD (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development), the other GDP (Gross Domestic Product). And in the headline “Turkiye may evaluate NATO applications of Finland, Sweden separately: FM,” there are also two abbreviations, that is, NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) and FM (Foreign Minister). Most of abbreviations make the news English more brief and short, but sometimes a new abbreviated word can bring some problems to the readers [8]. Given that, the author holds that there should be some brief explanatory notes at the end of the news. To sum up, it must be noted that reporting puts a special emphasis on timeliness. In other words, journalists need to deliver the latest news to the public in a short space of time, the sooner the better. Therefore, news must be brief and to the point, and this requires the use of abbreviations, which can both save space and give readers a concise presentation.

3.2. At Syntactic Level

3.2.1. Passive Voice

There are more passive sentences in English than in Chinese, which has something to do with the mindset of westerners. Likewise, news media make good use of the passive voice to play down the side doing the action, focusing on the result of an event. In this way, the objectivity and authenticity of news can be guaranteed. For example, in this sentence “Until recently it seemed a good chunk of Russia’s oil exports were financed on open credit by the Russian government, with traders paying for the goods once they had collected the proceeds themselves,” the focus is on the fact that Russia’s oil exports have been financed, so the passive voice is used here to avoid being too subjective. Further, the passive voice is often used by news media to shirk some of their responsibilities and improve the image of the interest groups they represent. For example, the headline “Protesters dispersed with tear gas so Trump could pose at church” uses the passive voice, making it difficult for readers to tell which department could do such a horrible thing. For this reason, the use of passive voice promptly shifts the responsibility for the side doing the action to the receiving end of that action.

3.2.2. Long Sentence

In order to achieve the purpose of highlighting completely the points of a piece of news in limited space, editors not only choose words for their brevity and dramatic quality but also use very condensed structures [9]. News English is full of long sentences, which aim to give readers as much information as possible. By means of long sentences, the news text containing a great deal of information is compactly laid out, which helps to enhance its logic. For example, in this sentence “There will probably be particular scrutiny of some close results in states where Mr. Tinubu barely scraped over the threshold of 25% that any candidate needs to cross in at least two-thirds of Nigeria’s 36 states and the federal capital to avoid a run-off,” the difficult point lies in the cycle of attributive clauses. The first attributive clause led by “where” modifies the noun “states” preceding

it, and the second attributive clause led by “that” modifies the last noun “threshold” of the first attributive clause, step by step. Here comes another example. In this sentence “An earthquake of magnitude 5.9 shook northwest Turkey and was felt in Istanbul early on Wednesday, injuring 50 people and damaging some buildings in the province of Duzce, a government disaster agency and state media said,” there are coordinating conjunction, preposition and present participle, all of which extend the whole sentence.

4. Translation Strategies of News English in the Light of Skopos Theory

News translation generates texts that clearly deviate from what would traditionally be considered faithful and accurate translations of the original [10]. News translation means not only to translate reports from the source language into the target language, but also to polish the translation in a way that is compatible with the cultural backgrounds of the target language. More than that, a good translation must arouse a lively interest among target readers, making sure they have almost the same reading experience as source readers. For the above-mentioned reasons, the skopos theory proposed by the German functionalism serves as an important guide for the translation of news English.

As one of the most influential national newspapers in the US, the New York Times has launched its first foreign-language website, a Chinese-language version of the Times, which brings the best original New York Times journalism to global, affluent, well-educated Chinese audience. This paper selects 167 bilingual news items covering politics, economy, culture and tourism from the Chinese website of the New York Times, and sums up the applied translation strategies as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Applied translation strategies.

Translation strategy	Number	Proportion
Amplification	7	4.19%
Omission	18	10.78%
Literal translation	60	35.93%
Free translation	35	20.96%
Division	36	21.56%
Corresponding translation	11	6.58%

It can be seen from table 1 that literal translation, free translation and division, all of which account for over 70%, are the main translation strategies adopted in E-C translation of those news items. Besides, other translation strategies such as amplification, omission and corresponding translation also take their share and deserve to be mentioned.

4.1. Amplification

A key characteristic of news is its sound logic and clear expression. In view of this, translators sometimes use amplification in doing news translation. Amplification means adding necessary details to the original without altering its meaning, so as to make it easier for target readers to understand.

Example 1

ST: U.S. President Joe Biden is ordering the release of one million barrels of oil per day from the nation’s strategic petroleum reserve for six months, the White House said on Thursday. (The target text (TT) is shown in Figure 1.)

TT: 白宫在周四发表声明，美国总统拜登下令未来六个月将从美国战略石油储备中每天释放 100 万桶石油，累计释放 1.8 亿桶。

Figure 1. The target text (TT) of Example 1.

In this case, the translator adds “lei ji shi fang 1.8 yi tong” to the translation, which can be inferred from the figures in the sentence. Sticking to the skopos rule, the translator tries to help readers read between the lines and acquire a better understanding of the original.

Example 2

ST: As we showed in last week's debate, the flag of convenience system leads to deplorable conditions and high incidences of accidents and losses of vessels. (The target text (TT) is shown in Figure 2.)

TT: 正如我们在上周辩论中所提出的那样，方便船（挂有方便旗的船舶，受所属船旗国的管辖和保护）体系会造成高发事故及船只损失。

Figure 2. The target text (TT) of Example 2.

Here the phrase “flags of convenience” translates literally as “fang bian qi”, which may confuse some target readers if they are totally ignorant of sailing. It is for this reason that additional background or supplementary information is presented in brackets in the translation. This example is a clear demonstration of the skopos rule. As mentioned earlier, one of the purposes of reporting is to pass clear and unbiased information to the public, so it is necessary for the translator to explain the term “flags of convenience”.

4.2. Omission

Translation by omission is a translation strategy where the translator can omit particular item or expression which is not vital enough in delivering the meaning to the target language [11]. In doing news translation, translators must drop some non-essential or ambiguous words without detriment to the original, thus achieving a lucid and compelling translation. Omission is often regarded as the last means that incompetent translators can resort to. However, in some cases, this means serves as the simplest solution to translation difficulties, which even requires a proficiency in two languages.

Example 3

ST: The Tianzhou-3, a cargo spacecraft carrying supplies to China's space station, fully separated from its core module Tianhe on Sunday at 10:59 (BTJ), after completing all assigned space station assembly tasks. (The target text (TT) is shown in Figure 3.)

TT: 天舟三号货运飞船完成全部既定任务，于周日 10 时 59 分撤离空间站“天和”核心舱。

Figure 3. The target text (TT) of Example 3.

In this case, the postpositive attributive “carrying supplies to China's space station” is omitted because it overlaps with the meaning of “a cargo spacecraft”. As is known to all, the cargo spacecraft is exactly a kind of vehicle shipping goods to the space station. If the translator just literally translates this part as “xiang zhong guo kong jian zhan yun song wu zi de huo yun fei chuan”, then the whole translation may seem a little bit wordy. The use of omission can, therefore, avoid lengthy narrative, and make the translation straightforward and accessible. In accordance with the skopos rule and the coherence rule, the translation reads smoothly and effortlessly.

Example 4

ST: Noted advertising executive Sir Martin Sorrell, founder of WPP, the world's largest ad and PR group, said on a recent panel that he expects the way companies buy ad space will become

automated “in a highly effective way” within five years. (The target text (TT) is shown in Figure 4.)

TT: 世界上最大的广告和公关集团 WPP 的创始人苏铭天爵士预测，五年内公司决策和购买广告位的方式将实现自动化。

Figure 4. The target text (TT) of Example 4.

Here the phrase “in a highly effective way” literally translates as “yi yi zhong gao xiao de fang shi”, the meaning of which can be inferred from the word “automated” preceding it. Really, automation is synonymous with convenience and efficiency. Here, the translator, in conformity with the skopos rule and the coherence rule, adopts omission to achieve a coherent and intelligible translation.

4.3. Literal Translation

When it comes to the translation strategies of news English, the most basic one is literal translation, which means translating anything from one language into another, word by word. Literal translation is where the form of the original is retained as much as possible, even if those forms are not the most natural forms to preserve the original meaning [12]. With the aid of literal translation, the translator can be less subjectively involved in translation, thus getting his work done quickly. In addition, literal translation guarantees a translation quite corresponding to the original, especially in the translation of culture-loaded words.

Example 5

ST: Greek weightlifter Leonidas Sampanis was reduced to tears after being stripped of his bronze medal. These tears couldn't move anybody since in sports there is no shortage of cheaters and liars shedding crocodile tears. (The target text (TT) is shown in Figure 5.)

TT: 希腊举重运动员列奥尼达斯·桑帕尼斯在被剥夺铜牌后流下了眼泪。这些眼泪无法打动任何人，因为在体育运动中，不乏有作弊者和说谎者留下鳄鱼的眼泪。

Figure 5. The target text (TT) of Example 5.

Here the phrase “crocodile tears” literally translates as “e yu de yan lei”. Derived from a Western proverb, the well-known phrase “crocodile tears” bears the same meaning as the Chinese saying “mao ku hao zi jia ci bei”, which means someone pretending to be sorrowful. In this example, the translator, guided by the skopos rule and the fidelity rule, uses literal translation as a way to remain loyal to the original and promote cultural output as well.

Example 6

ST: Once the yield curve control is abandoned, the bond yield will rise, which means that the Japanese government will pay more interest and financial institutions will suffer huge losses, opening a Pandora's box. (The target text (TT) is shown in Figure 6.)

TT: 一旦放弃收益率曲线控制，债券收益率将上升，这意味着日本即将打开潘多拉魔盒，政府要支付更多的利息，金融机构也会蒙受巨大损失。

Figure 6. The target text (TT) of Example 6.

In this case, the phrase “Pandora’s box”, from a famous Greek myth, literally translates as “pan duo la mo he”, which means inviting trouble. Applying the skopos rule and the fidelity rule, the translator use literal translation to preserve the cultural image contained in the words.

Example 7

ST: Google’s search engine, still the heart of its business, has made its parent, Alphabet, one of the world’s most valuable companies, with revenues of \$283bn in 2022 and a market capitalization of \$1.3trn. (The target text (TT) is shown in Figure 7.)

TT: 如今搜索引擎仍是谷歌的核心业务，其母公司 Alphabet 借此成为全球市值最高的公司之一，2022 年营收 2830 亿美元，市值达 1.3 万亿美元。

Figure 7. The target text (TT) of Example 7.

In example 7, the structure of the English sentence is very similar to that of Chinese, so there is no need for the translator to rearrange the word order. On this account, the translator simply uses literal translation to achieve both faithfulness and fluency, which echoes the coherence rule and the fidelity rule.

4.4. Free Translation

Free translation means breaking up the surface structure of the original into different parts and then reconstructing them. This is based on a clear understanding of the deep structure of the original. In other words, free translation is a strategy adopted by translators to remain the content of the original unchanged while take the form different from that of the original but acceptable to target readers. Free translation highlights the equivalence of meaning compared with literal translation. In news translation, the use of free translation allows translators to put their creative talents to good use. That is to say, there is no need for them to stick too precisely to the original.

Example 8

ST: In stressed-out South Korea, people are paying to stare at clouds and trees (The target text (TT) is shown in Figure 8.)

TT: 疫情反复压力大，韩国人只想找个地方发呆

Figure 8. The target text (TT) of Example 8.

In this headline, “paying to stare at clouds and trees” literally translates as “hua qian qu kan yun he shu”, which may throw most target readers into confusion. According to the coherence rule, a good translation must be comprehensible and natural to target readers. Because of this, the translator here uses free translation to translate the phrase as “zhao ge di fang fa dai huo fang kong”, making it easier for target readers to understand.

Example 9

ST: The zoo had to introduce a ticketing system to reserve slots to watch her gambol around her enclosure. (The target text (TT) is shown in Figure 9.)

TT: 动物园不得不采取抽签方式让观众们一睹其“萌态”。

Figure 9. The target text (TT) of Example 9.

This news is about the return of Xiang Xiang, the giant panda and the most popular attraction at Tokyo’s Ueno Zoological Gardens. In this case, the translation of the word “gambol” is a clear illustration of the skopos rule and the fidelity rule. This word, which means jumping or running in a lively way, is translated as “meng tai” by the translator. In this way, the charming image of the giant panda is properly presented to target readers, arousing their interests in the news.

4.5. Division

Division is a frequently used method for the translation of news English. To put it in a nutshell, division means dividing the long sentence into shorter ones in an effort to make expressions natural to the Chinese. There are three main types of division: word-division, phrase-division and sentence-division.

Example 10

ST: The technology giant’s announcement that it was revising down its earnings expectations in

the fourth quarter of 2018, largely because of lower iPhone sales and signs of economic weakness in China, has already hit it hard: Apple's share price fell by 10% when the market opened on January 3rd. (The target text (TT) is shown in Figure 10.)

TT: 由于 iPhone 销售下滑, 以及中国经济疲软的迹象, 该科技巨头宣布下调 2018 年第四季度的营收预期。这对公司造成重创: 1 月 3 日开盘时, 苹果股价低开近 10%。

Figure 10. The target text (TT) of Example 10.

Here, the translator uses division to translate the appositive clause followed by “announcement” as a self-contained sentence, and then replaces it with the word “Zhe” in what follows. In line with the skopos rule and the coherence rule, the translation reads smoothly.

Example 11

ST: The fact that the underlying driver of climate change is the total amount of carbon dioxide emitted means that reducing net emissions will always have a logical pride of place that translates into lion's share of attention. (The target text (TT) is shown in Figure 11.)

TT: 事实上, 气候变化的决定因素是二氧化碳的排放总量。这意味着无论如何, 从逻辑上看, 减少净排放量是绝对优先事项, 且应进一步转化为实际工作的重中之重。

Figure 11. The target text (TT) of Example 11.

Obviously, here the whole sentence is composed of a main clause and an objective clause, followed by an attributive clause respectively. The translator first translates the subject “the fact” as a separate sentence, then the objective clause and attributive clause. Besides, the translator uses division in translating the adjective “logical”. In accordance with the coherence rule, the use of division guarantees a translation full of short punchy sentences that read smoothly.

4.6. Corresponding Translation

Corresponding translation means replacing the idiom in the source language with a synonymous one in the target language. It is widely known that there are many popular set phrases, common sayings, proverbs, aphorisms and verses in both Chinese and English. Those concise expressions with implied meanings add to the aesthetic of the rhythm.

Example 12

ST: Unless tourism is brought under firmer discipline, it will destroy itself, as the costs at present outweigh the benefits. Many of our tourist attractions are within striking distance of killing the goose which lays the golden eggs. (The target text (TT) is shown in Figure 12.)

TT: 如果不对旅游业实施更为严格的监管, 它将走上自我毁灭的道路, 因为目前该行业的成本已经大大超出了其效益。许多旅游景点即将面临一场杀鸡取卵式的开发。

Figure 12. The target text (TT) of Example 12.

The news is about some chaotic phenomena in the travel market. Here the translator, guided by the skopos rule, uses corresponding translation to translate the phrase “killing the goose which lays the golden eggs” as “sha ji qu luan”, finding an echo in the hearts of target readers.

Example 13

ST: If the world's largest debtor kept eating May's grain in April and kept robbing Peter to pay Paul without fiscal discipline, eagerness to balance budget or effective efforts to boost sluggish economy, how can the creditors keep lending without doubts? (The target text (TT) is shown in Figure 13.)

TT: 如果全球最大的债务国在四月份还在吃五月份的粮食，还在拆东墙补西墙，毫无财政纪律，也不急于平衡预算或采取有效措施提振低迷经济，那么债权人怎么能毫无疑问地继续放贷呢？

Figure 13. The target text (TT) of Example 13.

In this case, if the phrase “robbing Peter to pay Paul” is literally translated as “qiang le Peter de qian qu fu gei Paul”, then the whole translation is complete nonsense. It is for this reason that the translator adopts a synonymous Chinese idiom “chai dong qiang bu xi qiang” to make the translation easy to read and understand, which is a good display of the skopos rule and the coherence rule.

Example 14

ST: In the era of financial capitalism, profits were separated from the real economy from the very beginning. The greater the economic fluctuation, the more drastic the change of capital value, the more opportunities for financial capital to fish in troubled waters and profit from it. (The target text (TT) is shown in Figure 14.)

TT: 在金融资本主义时代，利润从一开始就与实体经济相分离。经济波动越大，资本价值变动越剧烈，金融资本就有更多的机会浑水摸鱼并从中获利。

Figure 14. The target text (TT) of Example 14.

Here, the phrase “to fish in troubled waters” is ironically translated as “hun shui mo yu” or “chen huo da jie”. The use of corresponding translation makes it extremely easy to translate idioms. It is noteworthy, however, that this translation strategy requires some sort of knowledge about literature. Only when the translator fully appreciates the similarity between two languages can he get the best match.

5. Conclusion

The paper approaches news English translation from the perspective of skopos theory. A number of examples are collected for analysis and six translation strategies for news English are discussed in detail accordingly, all of which proves, to a large extent, that skopos theory serves as a good guide for the translation of news English. The skopos theory, which emphasizes the communicative effect of a translation, is particularly applicable to the translation of non-literary texts like news. News translation aims at a second spread of valuable information among the public, adding momentum to the development of journalism and communication. In this way, translators of news texts need to adopt flexible strategies in translation to ensure that target readers enjoy the same reading experience as source readers, thereby facilitating cultural exchanges.

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