A Comparative Analysis of AI Translation Quality from the Perspective of Skopos Theory: A Case Study of The Governance of China IV

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Abstract: Artificial intelligence tools have played a critical role in translation. DeepSeek is a widely recognised AI tool with several unique advantages in China. The effective use of AI tools in translation can enhance efficiency. However, evaluating whether AI tools could better tell China's story is vital. This paper utilizes DeepSeek to perform the translation task of *The Governance of China IV* to compare the translation of abbreviations, four-character phrases, and vocabulary with Chinese characteristics from the perspective of Skopos theory. This study aims to analyse quality differences and assess how well it conveys China's development concepts while showcasing elements of Chinese culture. Translators can cooperate with AI tools to proofread texts, correct errors, and consider connotations in both source and target texts.

1. Introduction

In January 2025, the DeepSeek-R1 model was officially released, focusing on natural language processing and machine learning applications. It excels in cross-linguistic tasks like Chinese-English translation, combining advanced neural machine translation techniques with domain-specific adaptations to handle complex texts. The advancement of artificial intelligence has transformed translation needs and technologies, sparked new ideas and research regarding machine translation, and prompted us to reconsider the cultural significance of translation. In contrast, AI has become a significant tool providing convenience and contributing to concerns[1].

This paper compares translation versions of *The Governance of China IV* and analyses their differences. As one of the key documents of the Communist Party of China (CPC), *The Governance of China IV* has become a widely published work by Chinese leaders, available in numerous languages since the reform and opening up in China[2]. China's voice plays a crucial role in promoting positive images of the nation[3]. Additionally, this paper explores whether the quality of AI translation surpasses translators'.

2. The Characteristics of Chinese Political Text

This paper analyses specific words from *The Governance of China IV*, which incorporates thoughts on socialism with Chinese characteristics and includes unique abbreviations. These words have been

continuously refined according to the development of contemporary China. And they employ numerous allusions to the distinctive context in Chinese history. Furthermore, they conform to the unique evolution of a socialist country, comprising specialised terms that reflect the advancement of socialism with Chinese characteristics.

3. Three Rules of Skopos Theory

German translator Vermeer proposed Skopos theory, a translation model driven by human behaviour[4]. This theory views translation as a cross-cultural process with specific purposes. In other words, translation is a purposeful activity. Translators ought to identify the translation's purpose for target readers, considering their cultural context, expectations and needs[5].

The Skopos theory states that the target text has to be faithful, accurately reflecting its characteristics, linguistic style and content[6]. Translation of *The Governance of China IV* ought to analyse the source text to achieve its intended function by employing suitable strategies. This involves accurately understanding China's concepts, guidelines, policies and the current state of development to tell a Chinese story effectively.

3.1 The Skopos Rule

Skopos theory posits that the act of translation is determined by its purpose. In other words, the translation stems from a defined objective[4] while achieving the cultural-communicative function. Translators ought to consider the communicative purpose and cultural context of target readers.

3.2 The Coherence Rule

The coherence rule states that translation ought to abide by the target readers' context[7]. Translators need to adhere to grammatical norms, idiomatic usage, and expressions. Therefore, it is essential to follow the linguistic convention and context of the target languages.

3.3 The Fidelity Rule

Nord finds that Skopos theory can be influenced by cultural differences and the communicative purpose. The coherence rule and the fidelity rule ought to be in accordance with the Skopos rule[8]. Therefore, the fidelity rule requires that the target text remains faithful to the source text. Specifically, when translating *The Governance of China IV*, due to the differences between English and Chinese, flexible methods ought to be employed to tell Chinese stories and disseminate Chinese ideas.

4. Comparison Analysis

This chapter compares differences between official and DeepSeek's versions of translation, concentrating on abbreviations, four-character phrases, and vocabulary with Chinese characteristics. The quality of translation is analysed from the perspective of Skopos theory.

4.1 Abbreviations

Abbreviations in political texts hold specific meanings and often convey more nuanced content than standard words. According to Skopos theory, translation ought to give priority to understanding the intent behind these abbreviations, ensuring that the translation accurately reflects both the content of the source text and its historical context.
Example 1

OT (Official Translation): …stabilize the Six Fronts－employment, finance, foreign trade, inbound investment, domestic investment, and market expectations, and guarantee the Six Priorities—jobs, daily living needs, food and energy security, industrial and supply chains, the operation of market players, and the smooth functioning of grassroots government[9].

DT (DeepSeek Translation): …implement the tasks of ensuring the "Six Stabilities" and maintaining the "Six Guarantees".

In Example 1, the official translation uses an annotation method to clarify the meaning of abbreviations. This approach helps readers understand what "the Six Fronts" involves, enhancing their comprehension of the source text. It conforms to both the Skopos rule and the fidelity rule. Essentially, it effectively conveys information about the source text and aims to promote Chinese terminology and foster international dialogue. The word "Fronts" highlights different categories, directions or work areas. In comparison, DeepSeek opts for "Stabilities" to maintain a smooth and predictable state in the economic and social spheres. While"the Six Fronts" encompasses employment, finance and other critical areas. Therefore, the official translation exemplifies the Skopos rule effectively.

The official translation chooses "the Six Priorities", which emphasises priority—specifically, the six tasks that require urgent attention and advancement. In contrast, the expression "Six Guarantees" focuses on the assurance of six specific items, highlighting a series of initiatives and actions. The main focus of the source text is to communicate a sense of priority. Thus, the expression "the Six Priorities" complies with the source text and the fidelity rule.

Example 2

OT: The whole Party should continue to give top priority to matters related to agriculture, rural areas and rural people[9].

DT: We must persist in making the resolution of issues relating to agriculture, rural areas, and farmers the top priority in the work of the entire Party.

In Example 2, DeepSeek translates the source text into "agriculture, rural areas, and farmers", where the word "farmers" is not synonymous with "rural people" in the official translation. The word "farmers" refers to individuals engaging in agricultural production, focusing on activities such as cultivating land and raising livestock as their primary occupation, thus emphasizing their occupational attributes. In contrast, the source text aims to describe individuals residing in rural areas, including both farmers and non-agricultural workers. Therefore, the official translation adheres to the Skopos and fidelity rules.

4.2 Four-Character Phrases

Chinese four-character phrases are rich in cultural elements. They abound in rhythm and hold practical importance in political texts. The target text ought to adhere to the fidelity rule, ensuring that the meaning is conveyed faithfully and the practical significance of political texts, illustrating the concept of China's development and promoting Chinese culture.

Example 3

OT: Only when agriculture is stable can a country enjoy peace[9].

DT: Agriculture is the foundation of the nation; when the foundation is secure, the nation is at peace.

This idiom derives from *the Book of Documents* (one of China's earliest compilations of historical documents). The official translation of Example 3 conveys the meaning of the source text concisely, and DeepSeek translates it into two sentences. The former abides more closely with the coherence rule. The official translation uses the term "stable" to describe an abstract concept, while "secure" refers to a well-protected concrete entity. Since the source text aims to convey stability at the national

level, the word "stable" aligns better with the fidelity rule.

Example 4

OT: In a country, the people are the most important[9].

DT: Vast as heaven and earth may be, the people are the foundation.

The idiom was introduced by Li Shimin, an emperor of the Tang Dynasty. In this context, "the people" refers to the people of ancient China and embodies the principle of people-oriented governance. The official translation aims to convey the message accurately, meaning "the people are the most important in a country."

However, DeepSeek opts for"vast as heaven and earth", which fails to maintain its cultural significance and does not adhere to the fidelity rule. Despite this, the official translation successfully conveys that the people hold primary importance in a country's governance rather than translating the source text literally.

4.3 Vocabulary with Chinese Characteristics

Vocabulary with Chinese Characteristics is a crucial medium for showcasing China's cultural traits and social development to the world. It relies on cultural heritage to reflect the social characteristics of specific periods, infused with values and prevailing ideas. These words embody rich connotations of Chinese culture[10]. According to Skopos theory, translating vocabulary with Chinese characteristics ought to effectively convey China's charm and enhance cultural imagery.

Example 5

OT: Our Party's founding mission is easy to define. Ensuring that we stay true to that mission is much more difficult[9].

DT: It is easy to attain one's original aspiration, but hard to remain steadfast to the end.

In Example 5, the translation of "Our Party's founding mission" in the official version reflects the historical context and cultural connotations of political texts. This phrase emphasises the pursuit of happiness for the Chinese people and the revitalisation of China. In addition, it highlights the party's deep affection for the people and its responsibility for national rejuvenation. DeepSeek translates it into "one's original aspiration", which does understand the authentic meaning. Consequently, the version of DeepSeek's translation does not adhere to the Skopos theory. The Skopos rule and the fidelity rule focus on the deeper meaning to effectively convey Chinese political thoughts and culture to the world.

Example 6

OT: …withstand tests, resist temptation, and become rational political actors[9].

DT: …stand unwavering through trials and tempests, remain resolute against temptations and entrapments, and steadfastly uphold political clarity and integrity.

In Example 6, the official translation employs only nine words to convey the information concisely and accurately, whereas DeepSeek uses nineteen words. Flexible methods can be applied to promote Chinese culture, but they need to apply with the coherence rule: target texts ought to be concise and coherent to target readers effectively. Therefore, by refining the interpretation of the source text, the target text ought to express "withstand tests, resist temptation, and become rational political actors".

5. Conclusion

People have become increasingly accustomed to the convenience that AI translation offers, which has undoubtedly advanced the field of translation. However, translators are better equipped to understand the intention of the source text. In this paper, DeepSeek's translation of abbreviations, four-character phrases, and vocabulary with Chinese characteristics conveys the basic meaning but overlooks cultural connotations and fails to capture the historical context. Given that the entire text

was not translated using DeepSeek, the AI did not accurately grasp the semantics by considering the context as thoroughly as the translator did. This limitation resulted in an inability to translate the source text accurately.

Translators can enhance the quality of AI translation by proofreading texts, correcting errors, and considering connotations in both source and target languages. They can choose appropriate methods while respecting the cultures and languages involved. Thus, translators can collaborate effectively with AI tools to ensure the target text is both efficient and accurate.

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