

Education is Translation: A Translation Report

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Abstract: *The book Education is Translation: A Metaphor for Change in Learning and Teaching redefines the connotations of teaching and learning from an interdisciplinary perspective, regarding education as a dynamic “translation” process. An English-Chinese translation project of it was conducted to help Chinese readers to gain valuable insights for educational practice in promoting effective communication and interaction between teachers and students, and further driving the improvement and innovation of teaching methods. The Skopos Theory was applied as the theoretical guidance for this translation practice to ensure the accuracy and readability of the target text. It was found that the three rules of Skopos Theory, i.e. the Skopos rule, the coherence rule, and the fidelity rule, were applicable to addressing the difficulties encountered during the translation process. Guided by the Skopos rule, the core objective of translation was set as serving the comprehension needs of target readers. With respect to the coherence rule, conversion method, amplification technique, and sentence structure adjustment were applied to ensure readability of the target text. Based on the fidelity rule, techniques such as literal translation, amplification, and free translation were used to pursue faithfulness of the target text.*

Keywords: *Education is Translation: A Metaphor for Change in Learning and Teaching*, Skopos Theory, Translation techniques, Target readers.

1. Introduction

The book *Education is Translation: A Metaphor for Change in Learning and Teaching* [1] aims to provide actionable insights for educational practice, empowering teachers to better understand student learning, foster effective teacher-student communication, and ultimately drive the improvement and innovation of teaching methods. Rather than a prescriptive guide, this work positions education as being analogous to translation, framing it as a process of transforming knowledge, values, and ideas from one form to another—a metaphor for innovation in pedagogy. In this book, the author, Alison Cook-Sather proposes that education can be understood as a translation process, in which every learner acts both as a translator and as the subject of their own translation. Drawing on fields such as anthropology, literary, psychology, translation studies, and educational research, the author delves deeply into diverse educational experiences, offering critical insights and practical strategies to help educators and learners deepen their understandings of the essence of both teaching and learning, with special emphasis on how teachers and learners can reposition themselves to achieve transformative educational outcomes.

An English-Chinese translation project of this book was conducted to help Chinese readers to gain valuable insights from it concerning the essence of learning and teaching. During the whole translation process, many difficulties have emerged. The challenges mainly lie in the conversion of some confusing lexical meanings, intricate sentential logic, and the treatment of cultural disparities concerning educational philosophy. Generally speaking, the meanings of English words tend to be more flexible and possess more variable semantic ranges compared to Chinese words which are often more precise and have a narrower semantic scope. Therefore, when translating words that require background knowledge, translators must accurately grasp the intended meanings, identify multiple possible interpretations, and then select the appropriate equivalent suitable to the target linguistic context. In addition, there are lexical gaps and overlaps between the two languages; even if a more equivalent one is chosen, it might still be not able to accurately express the meaning of the

source text. Faced with this challenge, translators need to seek out more commonly used expressions in the target language to enhance the quality of the translation. At the syntactic level, some sentences with complex logical structures cannot be translated directly, but have to be transformed according to the syntax of the target language. Moreover, the content of the book is centered around the essence of education with a metaphoric lens. English and Chinese readers' different perceptions of the related educational philosophy and teaching concepts would also give rise to some difficulties to the translation job. Facing all the above-mentioned difficulties, a translation theory is naturally in need to guide this translation project. The Skopos Theory is the one that has been utilized for the present study.

2. The Skopos Theory in Translation Practice

2.1 Introduction to Skopos Theory

Katharina Reiss (1971) proposed that in translation, the target texts should be equivalent to source texts with respect to content, form, and communicative function [2]. However, extensive later translation practice showed that complete equivalence between the target and source texts is sometimes hard to achieve. In this case, complete equivalence is not the primary element of translation; instead, the function of the target text should be taken as the focus. This view laid the foundation for the emergence of Skopos theory. Meanwhile, Hans Vermeer (1978) further transcended the limitations of equivalence theory by asserting that all human actions were purpose-driven, and translation, as a form of communicative activity, was of no exception [3]. He took Skopos as the supreme criterion for all translation activities, emphasizing that the purpose of translation determines the entire translation process. Under this situation, the Skopos theory was systematically and publicly put forward by Katharina Reiss and Hans Vermeer in 1984 [4].

The Skopos theory breaks through traditional linguistic approaches and adopts a functional and communicative perspective towards translation. It comprises three fundamental rules: the Skopos rule, the coherence rule, and

the fidelity rule. First, the Skopos rule highlights that translation activities should be guided by the intended purpose of the target text. Typically, the “purpose” of translation refers primarily to the communicative purpose of the target text, i.e. the communicative effect it produces on readers within the sociocultural context of the target language. To some extent, this rule helps to get rid of the long-standing conflict between free translation and faithful translation. According to Nord (2001, p.29), “This rule is intended to solve the eternal dilemmas of free vs faithful translation, dynamic vs formal equivalence, good interpreters vs slavish translators” [5]. This means that translators must adapt to the background knowledge, communicative needs and expectations of the readers to complete the translation task. Second, the coherence rule requires the target text to be meaningful, coherent, and logically clear within the cultural and communicative environment of the target language. As Reiss and Vermeer (1984) states, the source text must achieve intertextual coherence—producing a text that resonates with target-culture readers. Third, the fidelity rule stipulates that the target text should maintain a semantic connection with the source text and strive to faithfully convey the original intent and content of it [4]. It emphasizes the importance of maintaining the original meaning, style, and intent of the source text in the translation process. As for the relationship between the three rules, Reiss and Vermeer (1984) believed that the fidelity rule is subordinate to the coherence rule, while with both serving to the Skopos rule [4]. Adherence to these three rules can guide translators to pursue complete information, maintain coherence, and achieve contextually appropriate fidelity in their translation practice.

2.2 The Applicability of Skopos Theory to Translation Practice

Earlier translation theories took the source text as the fundamental starting point of the translation process, aiming to fully reproduce the source text in the target language. However, the pursuit of faithful reproduction often proves overly idealistic. By contrast, as the core of functionalist translation theory, Skopos theory has propelled the shift of translation theory from a linguistic to a functionalist dimension. In this sense, translation is no longer viewed as a mere process of linguistic conversion but as a goal-oriented, cross-culturally communicative act. Skopos theory posits that regardless of whether the target text aligns with the source text, the translator’s core mission is to employ appropriate translation strategies to create a text that meets the needs of the target readers.

Skopos theory has progressively showcased its merits by enabling a departure from the rigid confines of source text centrism, thereby freeing translators from the limitations imposed by equivalence-based paradigms in former translation approaches (Pan, 2006) [6]. This theory has got extensive application in both literary and non-literary translation, offering valuable insights for improving the quality and acceptability of translated works. In the field of literary translation, Wen (2011) selected one of Lin Shu’s translation masterpieces *Heinu yutian lu* and conducted a detailed analysis of his translation purposes and methods based on Skopos Theory [7]. Wang and Zhang (2018) examined translation strategies for culture-loaded words from

the perspective of Skopos theory, noting that techniques such as “cultural adaptation” can effectively bridge cross-cultural disparities [8]. He and Liu (2023) used Arthur Waley’s translation of *The Analects of Confucius* to illustrate that the Skopos Theory can guide the translators to choose appropriate translation strategies for effective conversion of the classic Chinese metaphors used in the source text [9]. Meanwhile, many scholars also conducted translation studies on non-literary texts from the lens of the Skopos theory. For instance, Wang et al. (2010) applied Skopos Theory to conduct English translation of traditional Chinese medicine manuals [10]. Chen (2020) explored translation strategies for advertising slogans based on Skopos Theory, addressing that translators should make the translation texts relatable to the target readers, and thus to enhance product competitiveness in target markets [11]. Xu and Ma (2023) argued that translation of Intangible Cultural Heritage Publicity must strive to achieve the purpose of eliminating cultural barriers and ensuring the reading experience of the target readers [12].

To sum up, as a significant breakthrough in translation theory, Skopos theory holds broad practical guiding significance. It assists translators in deeply understanding the communicative intent of the source text, thereby formulating translation strategies tailored to target readers and enhancing the readability and acceptability of translated works. Skopos theory provides significant guidance for translation studies. It redefines the status of source and target texts from the perspective of social factors such as purpose and culture, while emphasizing that translation activities should be reader-oriented and focus on the reactions of the target readers. Consequently, translators must not only take linguistic factors but also various socio-cultural elements into consideration, to select appropriate translation methods flexibly and appropriately to achieve the communicative purposes.

3. Translation of *Education is Translation: A Metaphor for Change in Learning and Teaching* based on Skopos Theory

3.1 Difficulties in the Translation Process

Education is Translation: A Metaphor for Change in Learning and Teaching is an academic work, which presents discussions from diverse perspectives concerning the author’s perception of education. It incorporates the author’s abundant real-life observations on learning and teaching processes, with a distinct personal writing style. Therefore, when translating contents requiring professional knowledge, translators must have to consult academic sources to grasp the intended meaning. This might involve process of identifying multiple interpretations, comparing these against their translations, and analyzing them within context to select appropriate equivalents. However, lexical gaps or semantic overlaps between English and Chinese languages persist. Even when selecting the closest equivalent, it may still fail to fully convey the meaning of the source text. Facing these challenges, translators should prioritize the target readers’ perspectives and choose commonly-used expressions in the target language to render words and sentence structures appropriately, thereby preserving the intent of the source text. What’s more, translating the metaphor mapping between education and translation of the source text requires translators to precisely

grasp the cognitive connections between educational phenomena and translation practices. Due to cultural differences between China and the West, recognitions of metaphor use vary, which poses another kind of difficulty for the translators if they want to facilitate the accurate transmission of information from the source text to the target readers.

3.2 Solutions to Those Difficulties under the Guidance of Skopos Theory

3.2.1 The Skopos Rule

Skopos theory posits that all translation activities should be guided by the Skopos principle. The Skopos rule is the primary rule governing the entire translation activity (Nord, 2001) [6]. Generally, “Skopos” refers to the communicative purpose of the translated work, and the purpose of the translation act plays a dominant role in the entire translation process. Therefore, translators must clarify the context and purpose of the source text before translating, and select appropriate translation methods based on the purpose. That is to say, in the target language context and culture, translation should focus on meeting the needs of target readers and provide translations that accurately convey the original author’s intentions. As the purpose of translation varies, so do the strategies and methods employed by translators. Translators need not be overly constrained by the wording and syntax of the source text, but instead can adopt more flexible translation techniques to ensure that the translated text achieves its intended communicative function in the target context.

Example 1

ST: In addition, the preservice teachers begin an exchange of letters with high school students, meet regularly and exchange emails with experienced teachers, and begin as well to visit the classroom in which they will be completing student teaching the following semester.

TT: 此外, 职前教师开始与高中生进行书信交流, 定期与经验丰富的教师会面并互通邮件, 同时他们也开始参观自己将在下学期开展实习教学的教室。

When translating this academic text, translators must prioritize the accuracy of educational terminology. To ensure Chinese readers’ precise understanding of the educational concepts intended by the source text, the translators consulted several parallel academic texts. In this way, terms such as “preservice teachers”, “student teaching” were finally rendered as “职前教师” and “实习教学”, which are typical Chinese professional education terms. In terms of syntactic processing, the translators employed sentence restructuring to adapt to Chinese parataxis. The three parallel actions “exchange”, “meet”, and “exchange” in the source text were restructured into a series of fluid clauses in the Chinese translation, separated by commas. This approach aligns seamlessly with the natural flow of Chinese sentences. Besides, the relative clause “in which they will be completing student teaching” was converted into a pre-posed attribute “下学期将开展实习教学的……” to preserve the logical relationship of the original English expression while

conforming to Chinese syntax.

Example 2

ST: The metaphor of translation follows in the spirit of these dynamic ways of conceptualizing learning to teach, and it illuminates the educational experience of preservice teachers as they develop discursive forms through which they can both understand and be understood by high school students and as they forge dynamic and integrated identities for themselves.

TT: 翻译这一隐喻秉承了这些动态化教学理念学习方式的精髓, 它揭示了职前教师在教育过程中的体验: 一方面, 他们通过发展话语形式, 让自己既能理解高中生, 又能被高中生所理解; 另一方面, 他们也在为自己塑造动态且综合的身份认同。

In this sentence, the author employed the translation metaphor to highlight the change in teachers’ learning and teaching practices. The target text maximized the retention of the original metaphorical logic while adapting it to Chinese linguistic conventions. For example, “揭示” was chosen to retain the metaphorical meaning of “illuminate” in the source text (like a lighthouse shining a path), vividly conveying how the “translation metaphor” enlightens educational experiences. This avoids the abstraction of a literal translation like “阐明” and better aligns with Chinese expressive habits of using metaphors to enhance theoretical appeal. Besides, “塑造” was employed to replace the literal translation choice “锻造” for “forge”, which is more suitable to accord with the concept of “cultivating identity” in Chinese educational context. When dealing with complex sentence structure, the long sentence with embedded subordinate clauses in the source text was cut and transformed to two short and independent Chinese sentences. This run-on sentence structure is well-suited to the reading habits of Chinese readers and greatly enhances their reading efficiency. Meanwhile, the adding of the parallel structure “一方面……另一方面……” makes the translation to be not only logically coherent but also reader friendly.

3.2.2 The Coherence Rule

The coherence rule in Skopos Theory posits that the target text must adhere to the criterion of intratextual coherence, meaning it should be readable and acceptable, enabling the target readers to comprehend it and find it meaningful within the target language culture and the communicative context in which it is used. It underscores that the purpose of translation is to facilitate a better understanding of the source text by the target readers. During the translation process, translators should be guided by the target audience within the target culture, selecting appropriate translation strategies to ensure that the target text is understood and disseminated within the target language context. The coherence of a text is a result of the interaction between knowledge presented in the text and the reader’s own knowledge and experience of the world (Baker, 2001) [13].

Example 3

ST: Students at this point in their formal education look back to their own high school experiences as well as forward to the experiences they want to provide for their future students.

TT: 在接受正规教育的这一阶段, (师范) 学生既会回顾自己过往的高中经历, 也会展望他们能会为未来学生所提供的教育体验。

Guide by the coherence rule, contextual information “接受正规教育” is supplemented through amplification technique so as to guarantee the readability of the target text. Meanwhile, logical flow is optimized by dividing the long English sentence represented by the use of conjunction “...as well as...” into two clauses in Chinese “既会回顾……, 也会展望……” for the purpose of making it easier for the target readers to comprehend. This treatment not only has strengthened the logical relationship of the connected information, but also accords with the paratactic expressive features of Chinese language. These techniques collectively achieve coherent expression in the target text while ensuring fidelity to the source text.

Example 4

ST: In these students' experiences we find the accustomedness to engaging with new languages and ways of thinking, because they are still formally students, combined with the vertigo of having to change themselves that professors in the last chapter faced, because they are preparing to be teachers.

TT: 从这些师范生的经历中, 我们发现他们既习惯了接触新的语言和思维方式 (因为他们名义上仍是学生), 又不得不面对如同上一章中教授们所经历的那种因身份转变而产生的眩晕感 (因为他们即将成为教师)。

The source text is a complex long sentence containing two adverbial clauses of reason. To pursue intra-textual coherence, the translators employed “既……又……” to correspond to the phrase “combined with” in the English sentence, underscoring the coexistence of these two kinds of experiences. Conversion method was used by the translators to transform the noun “accustomedness” to a verb in Chinese “习惯” to introduce the following content. This translation treatment conforms to the linguistic features that Chinese language tends to be more of a verbal language, while English leans more towards a nominal language. As for the translation of “vertigo”, amplification technique was applied through addition of the verb “面对” in the Chinese version to provide context for “vertigo”.

3.2.3 The Fidelity Rule

The Fidelity Rule requires inter-textual coherence between the source and target text, which means the translation should remain faithful to the source text. However, adherence to fidelity is conditional upon fulfilling the Skopos Rule — prioritizing the communicative purpose of the translation while maintaining a focus on the target reader. Guided by this principle, translators can select appropriate strategies and expressions to ensure the target text aligns with the cultural and contextual requirements of target readers, thereby achieving the intended purpose and ensuring the effectiveness and acceptability of the target text.

Example 5

ST: “Marginally situated in two worlds,” they are cast in the dual role of student-teacher, and they are expected to transition from the former role into the latter as they prepare to move from the college culture (back) to the high school.

TT: “游走于两个世界之间, 处于边缘境地”, 他们身兼学生与教师的双重角色, 在准备从大学文化 (回归) 到高中环境的过程中, 人们期望他们能从学生这一角色过渡到教师这一角色。

The translation of this sentence primarily employs the technique of literal translation, particularly in the extensive use of literal rendering for words and phrases to demonstrate its fidelity to the original information of the source text. “Marginally situated” was literally translated as “处于边缘境地”, which aligns with Chinese expression habits and represents a typical lexical correspondence in literal translation. What's more, amplification technique was also applied in this translation as the supplemented information provided by “游走于两个世界之间” for “Marginally situated in two worlds” to help the readers to match the meaning of “Marginally situated” with “they are cast in the dual role of student-teacher”. By prioritizing literal translation to preserve core concepts and supplementing cultural semantics through amplification, the target text was ensured to fully convey the information of the source text to the target readers.

Example 6

ST: They are at a particular moment of necessity in translation—a moment one faces when one moves from one culture or country to another—when one must not only learn to speak in new languages but must become a new person.

TT: 他们正处于翻译过程中一个必经时刻——当一个人从一种文化或国家迁移到另一种文化或国家时所面临的时刻——在这个时刻, 人们不仅要学会用新的语言说话, 还必须让自己蜕变成一个全新的自我。

This sentence uses the conceptual metaphor of translation to explain the change happens in education. It compares the change of teacher's identity as “moves from one culture or country to another” in translation job. In terms of semantic transmission, the word “必经” not only highlights the inevitability of this moment but also implies its significance, accurately conveying the key meaning of “necessity” in the source text. Additionally, regarding the treatment of the content within the dashes “a moment one faces when one moves from one culture or country to another”, the translators rendered it as “当一个人从一种文化或国家迁移到另一种文化或国家时所面临的时刻” by adopting free translation technique. This makes the translation align with the cognitive habits of the target readers better and ensures the integrity and clarity of the semantic transformation.

4. Conclusions

Following the guidance of the Skopos theory, *Education is Translation: A Metaphor for Change in Learning and*

Teaching was translated according to the established purpose: to enable target readers to fully understand the content and then gain benefits from it. The source text is an academic text and belongs to the informative type. During the translation process, specific challenges encountered in the translation process were solved through strictly following the three rules of Skopos theory, i.e. the Skopos rule, the coherence rule, and the fidelity rule. Guided by the skopos rule, the core objective of translation was set as serving the comprehension needs of target readers. With respect to the coherence rule, conversion method, amplification technique and sentence structure adjustment were applied to ensure readability of the target text. Based on the fidelity rule, techniques such as literal translation, amplification, and free translation were used to pursue faithfulness of the target text. Flexible application of these translation methods and techniques has greatly guaranteed the quality, especially readability, of the target texts.

In conclusion, case analyses of the present translation practice reveal that Skopos theory is highly applicable for the guidance of translating academic texts. Guided by the Skopos Theory, translation quality of *Education is Translation: A Metaphor for Change in Learning and Teaching* is well guaranteed, which is of great help for Chinese readers to gain valuable insights for educational practice in promoting effective communication and interaction between teachers and students, and further driving the improvement and innovation of teaching methods.

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