

A Study on Translation Strategies of Internet Buzzwords from the Perspective of Skopos Theory

Molin Ye

Nanjing University of Information Science and Technology, Nanjing 210044, Jiangsu, China

Abstract: *As an emerging distinctive linguistic product of the Internet era, internet buzzwords constitute a vital component of online communication among contemporary masses, carrying unique youth cultural connotations and characteristics of the times. Due to their inherent playful nature and culture-specific attributes, their Japanese translation for cross-cultural communication tends to generate semantic deviations and cultural misinterpretations, posing considerable translation difficulties. Taking Skopos Theory as the theoretical framework and typical Chinese internet buzzwords as research objects, this paper conducts case analyses to verify that the Japanese translation of internet buzzwords is not confined to a single approach. Instead, guided by communicative purposes, translators strike a dynamic balance between the coherence rule and the fidelity rule. While preserving the cultural connotations and linguistic features of the source text, such translations facilitate cross-cultural communication.*

Keywords: Skopos Theory, Internet buzzwords, Translation strategies, Cross-cultural communication.

1. Introduction

The iteration of Internet technology and the popularization of social media have spawned a massive volume of internet buzzwords. Characterized by concise forms, flexible pragmatic usage and prominent temporal attributes, such linguistic expressions highly condense the survival mentality and social ideological trends of contemporary youth, bearing strong cultural dependency. With the deepening of Sino-foreign digital cultural exchanges, the external translation of internet buzzwords has become a key channel to present an authentic modern China and disseminate youth mass culture. Nevertheless, internet buzzwords generally entail translation obstacles including extended meanings, dialectal origins, circle-specific metaphors, and conceptual vacancies between Chinese and foreign cultures. Mechanical literal translation easily triggers cognitive disconnection and semantic misunderstanding among target audiences. As a critical dimension of cross-cultural communication, translation shoulders the mission of promoting cultural exchange; it involves not merely linguistic conversion, but also cultural transformation [3].

Despite the growing body of research on internet buzzword translation, most domestic existing studies focus on Chinese-English translation, while theoretical researches integrating Japanese translation remain scarce. Moreover, current translation practices generally lack systematic theoretical support. Against this backdrop, this paper introduces Skopos Theory proposed by the German functionalist translation school in the 1970s. Abandoning the traditional evaluation criterion that translations must achieve formal equivalence with source texts, the theory advocates that translational activities are dominated by pre-set communicative purposes, allowing translators to flexibly adopt translation strategies according to expected communication effects.

The Japanese edition of People's China sorts out the semantics and etymology of Chinese internet buzzwords and provides standardized Japanese translations tailored for ordinary Japanese readers, balancing readability and cultural interpretation. It serves as an officially authorized external translation sample with high reference value. From the

perspective of Skopos Theory, this paper takes Japanese translations of internet buzzwords from the Japanese edition of People's China as empirical cases to systematically analyze the applicable scenarios and communicative value of various translation strategies, aiming to provide theoretical references for the Japanese translation practice of internet buzzwords.

2. An Overview of Skopos Theory

2.1 Core Premises of Skopos Theory

As the core of German functionalist translation theory, Skopos Theory was put forward by Hans Vermeer in the 1970s. Breaking away from traditional equivalence-based translation perspectives, it regards translation as a purpose-driven activity designed to realize cross-cultural and cross-linguistic communication. Vermeer argues that translations target specific recipient groups, defining translation as "a text produced for a certain purpose and target audience within the target language context" [1].

Skopos Theory frames translation as a dynamic decision-making process, where translators select appropriate translation strategies based on translational purposes, audience demands and text types to enable translated texts to perform expected functions in target contexts. With theoretical evolution, three core rules have been established: the skopos rule, the coherence rule, and the fidelity rule.

2.2 Three Core Rules of Skopos Theory

The principle of purpose is the core tenet of teleological theory; it dictates that every aspect of the translation process revolves around a predetermined purpose, meaning that any act of translation is determined by that objective. In practice, the translator must first clarify the purpose of the translation and subsequently determine the appropriate strategies and methods based on it. The principle of coherence focuses on the acceptability of the translated text within the target culture and communicative context. The translation must align with the linguistic conventions, logical structures, and cultural background of the target language, ensuring that the content is comprehensible to the target audience and maintains

coherence within the target context. Communication is considered successful only when the information received is perceived as highly consistent with the recipients' environment [2]. The principle of fidelity requires the translation to remain true to the content of the original text; the translator must convey the original information as accurately as possible and must not arbitrarily alter, omit, or add to the content. This principle does not demand formal equivalence between the translation and the original; rather, it requires fidelity regarding content, as determined by the translation's purpose.

The primary rule of translation is the purpose rule; the fundamental principle determining the translation process is the purpose of the translation activity as a whole [5]. Translating popular Chinese internet slang into Japanese involves two core communicative objectives: the surface-level goal of enabling the Japanese audience to grasp the literal meaning, and the deeper goal of fully conveying the nuanced pragmatic tones—such as praise, self-deprecation, sarcasm, or playful teasing—inherent in the terms, as well as the underlying Chinese socio-cultural context. Consequently, all translation choices must serve these dual objectives. At the same time, the translation must be logically coherent within the Japanese linguistic framework, align with native Japanese colloquial and online usage patterns, and ensure intelligibility. Translations should avoid the awkward piling up of kanji or the mechanical replication of Chinese word order; if a translation is obscure, unnatural, or incompatible with the logic of Japanese online interaction, it fails to facilitate basic communication and violates the principle of coherence. Furthermore, while the translation must maintain a certain level of semantic and emotional fidelity to the original, the form and degree of this fidelity are determined by the translation's purpose rather than by a requirement for mechanical, word-for-word equivalence. If strict literal fidelity would undermine the core communicative objectives, the linguistic form may be adjusted as necessary to prioritize the transmission of the intended meaning and emotional essence.

3. Internet Buzzwords

3.1 Definition

Internet buzzwords refer to linguistic expressions that originate and circulate widely within the online environment [4]. They are symbolic forms of language—encompassing neologisms, puns, acronyms, and metaphorical phrases—created by internet users during specific periods and spread extensively through online social interactions, characterized by high virality and strong emotional expressiveness. These terms are both products of the rapid development and popularization of internet technology and a mirror reflecting social reality through the lens of online entertainment culture and mass communication. As a unique cultural phenomenon, internet buzzwords do more than introduce novel vocabulary or modes of expression; to a certain extent, they reflect the trends of public opinion, social psychological needs, and the values held by the general public during specific times. By transcending the limitations of traditional print media, they have become a vital medium for connecting the emotions of netizens and fostering interpersonal communication,

embodying distinct characteristics of the times and a dynamic nature.

3.2 Linguistic Features

As a unique linguistic phenomenon, internet buzzwords bear prominent distinctive traits. First, adapted to rapid input and communication online, they adopt highly concise forms—whether abbreviations or phrases—to convey abundant information with minimal characters, boosting communication efficiency and fitting the fast-paced communication habits of contemporary society. Second, internet buzzwords serve as an active frontier for linguistic innovation, adopting diverse formation mechanisms including letters, numerals and symbols, alongside rhetorical devices such as homophony, metaphor and semantic shift to coin new expressions. Such innovation renders language more intuitive and vivid, with evolving semantics and forms alongside shifts in online environments. Third, many internet buzzwords evoke vivid imagery and daily life vibes; through concrete metaphors or contextual associations, they intuitively depict specific states or emotions. Derived from daily spoken language and online chats, they are easy to understand, naturally integrating into daily communication and enhancing linguistic appeal and affinity. Finally, acting as a cultural carrier and "barometer" of society, internet buzzwords are closely tied to hot social events and cultural phenomena, truthfully reflecting public mental states and aesthetic orientations, bearing profound temporal imprints and recording social and cultural transformations.

These characteristics determine that translating internet buzzwords cannot adopt the traditional literary translation standard of "formal equivalence". Priority must be given to target audience comprehensibility and pre-set communicative objectives. The functional-purpose-oriented theoretical framework of Skopos Theory perfectly fits translational analyses of such culture-loaded lexis.

4. Case Analysis

4.1 Integrated Literal Translation

Literal translation applies to internet buzzwords with intuitive semantics and low cultural barriers, whose surface structures carry communicative value. Such lexis feature clear core meanings without complex native metaphors. The core communicative goals of translation include retaining unique Chinese word-formation characteristics, restoring original semantics and tones, while optimizing sentence structures in line with Japanese colloquial conventions to lower comprehension thresholds, balancing cultural export and cross-cultural communication. From the perspective of Skopos Theory, literal translation does not equate to mechanical word-for-word correspondence; instead, it realizes selective content fidelity while ensuring intra-textual coherence of target texts.

Example 1

Original text: 绝绝子

Target text: 超絶やばい

The term "绝绝子" (Absolutely Amazing) is formed with the

distinctive Chinese suffix "子", primarily used to deliver extreme praise and occasionally sarcasm, with a core meaning of "excellent, stunning, beyond expectation". Guided by Skopos Theory, the integrated literal translation strategy is adopted: "超絶" corresponds to the source text's connotation of extremity, paired with the youth slang "やばい" widely used among Japanese young people to construct a complete expression. This approach preserves the source text's exaggerated emphatic logic while conforming to Japanese daily online communication habits, fulfilling dual communicative goals: exporting Chinese unique word-formation features and conveying appreciative semantics. Pure transliteration "絶絶子" violates Japanese lexical formation logic entirely, failing to deliver any semantic information to Japanese netizens and directly contradicting the core cross-cultural comprehension goal. Simplified pure free translation "すごい" (amazing) achieves basic intelligibility yet completely erases the distinctive exaggerated Chinese expressive form, losing the in-depth objective of disseminating native linguistic characteristics. The translation balances the requirement for natural, fluent Japanese expression; without mechanically replicating Chinese reduplicative structures, it captures the core sentiment of profound admiration found in the original text, thereby achieving functional fidelity across languages. The overall approach balances cultural dissemination, audience comprehension, and semantic accuracy, fully aligning with Skopos theory—which centers on communicative purpose while balancing intra-lingual coherence with a nuanced, flexible approach to fidelity.

Example 2

Original text: 老己

Target text: 私ちゃん

The Chinese internet term "老己" (Dear Self) follows exclusive Chinese word-formation conventions: the prefix "老" preceding nouns denotes intimacy, while "己" refers to oneself. Combined, the phrase connotes "dear self". Young people employ this term to engage in warm, inclusive inner dialogue with themselves from a third-person perspective. It subtly alleviates the awkwardness of directly uttering "I love myself", enabling self-compassion to be expressed lightly and casually. Here, the word for "self" is first translated directly as "私" to serve as the first-person pronoun. The suffix "ちゃん"—typically used for affectionate third-person address—is applied here to the self; this effectively replicates the tone of referring to oneself from a third-person perspective found in the original Chinese. This approach remains faithful to the logic of the original phrasing while accurately conveying its semantic meaning, ensuring the target audience understands the nuance and successfully facilitating the cross-cultural transmission of the intended emotional tone.

4.2 Explanatory Free Translation

For internet buzzwords featuring puns, circle-exclusive semantics or indigenous specific imagery, mechanical literal translation leads to semantic deviation, cultural misunderstanding and reading barriers, failing to achieve communicative purposes. Such lexis suit the explanatory free

translation strategy. Following Skopos Theory's core tenet that "purposes determine translation methods", translators abandon superficial textual structures and concrete imagery of source texts, focus on core semantics and actual pragmatic functions of buzzwords, and reconstruct target linguistic forms centered on audience comprehension and effective communication to deliver accurate meanings and adapt to contextual demands.

Example 3

Original text: 打鸟

Target text: 鳥を撮る

The Chinese term "打鸟" (literally "shooting birds") derives from the English word "shoot," which carries a double meaning: it refers to both the act of hunting or firing a weapon and the photographic act of taking pictures. Chinese photography enthusiasts borrow this pun to exclusively refer to wildlife photography using telephoto lenses. A literal translation into Japanese—such as "鳥を撃つ" (shooting birds with a gun)—would retain the original's surface structure but result in a significant semantic distortion, thereby undermining the goals of cross-cultural communication. Consequently, the term is best translated as "鳥を撮る" (photographing birds); by prioritizing the conveyance of the core meaning over a literal equivalence of form, the translation accurately reflects the intended sense. When dealing with internet slang that embodies specific wordplay or niche cultural connotations, translators should not rigidly pursue literal equivalence. Instead, they should adopt a flexible strategy guided by communicative objectives—ensuring semantic accuracy and bridging cultural gaps—to maximize the translation's communicative value within the target cultural context.

Example 4

Original text: 水灵灵地

Target text: 生き生きと

The traditional adjective "水灵灵地" has evolved into an adverbial form in online contexts. Its original imagery of "moist, watery" fades in internet usage, serving to describe people's lively, energetic demeanors with light teasing undertones. Mechanical word-for-word Japanese translation "水っぽい" (watery) triggers semantic distortion. Translators abandon replication of Chinese adjective structures and adopt explanatory free translation centered on the core pragmatic function of "full of vitality", selecting the universal Japanese stative adverb "生き生きと" (lively/vibrantly). This rendering enables target audiences to capture the teasing tone of complimenting others' vitality. Fidelity defined by Skopos Theory does not require rigid replication of source text character structures and superficial imagery, but faithfulness to the overall communicative intention and emotional core of lexis. Translation prioritizes conveying the true modifying functions and emotional hues of buzzwords; hence, translators opt for target-language expressions consistent with native usage conventions capable of restoring communicative effects, diluting indigenous concrete imagery difficult for foreign audiences to empathize with, removing cultural semantic

barriers, and enabling overseas readers to accurately perceive the lighthearted, humorous expressive characteristics of Chinese internet slang, thus facilitating smooth cross-cultural information transmission and emotional resonance.

4.3 Domestication

Domestication prioritizes target language cultural conventions, adapting source texts to target cultural norms and values.[6] For buzzwords whose surface imagery bears little dissemination value yet overlaps heavily with foreign emotional concepts, translators may discard superficial source imagery, extract core semantics, and replace them with well-established inherent lexical items in target languages. This strategy prioritizes the coherence rule to minimize comprehension obstacles.

Example 5

Original text: 配得感

Target text: 自己価値感

"配得感"(sense of worthiness) stems from the popularization of psychological concepts across Chinese online circles, with a core meaning of individuals' inner recognition that they deserve favorable things and are entitled to high-quality resources, bearing neutral-to-positive psychological connotations. Mature fixed terminology "自己価値感" (sense of self-worth) already exists in Japanese linguistic systems, whose semantic scope and emotional tendencies fully cover the connotations of "配得感". Direct adoption of this inherent Japanese concept ensures intra-textual coherence and compliance with Japanese expressive norms, allowing target audiences to grasp meanings instantly without additional cultural background explanations and realizing efficient information transmission. Fidelity under Skopos Theory never demands mechanical replication of source text character forms, but faithfulness to the overall semantic scope, emotional hues and communicative functions of lexis. The translation discards the original Chinese terminology while fully capturing the core definition—"acknowledging one's own worth and deserving of beautiful things"—and preserving the term's neutral-to-positive emotional tone; by breaking free from the constraints of formal equivalence, it achieves a deeper fidelity to the underlying meaning.

Example 6

Original text: 冤种

Target text: 間抜け

Originating from Northeast Chinese dialects, the internet term "冤种" (Sucker/ Chump) describes groups who suffer losses and bear blame unjustly without reciprocal rewards, carrying undertones of self-deprecation, teasing and mild derogation. For translating this term, translators extract the core semantics of "foolish, prone to suffering losses and grievances" and select the semantically analogous Japanese lexical item "間抜け". This Japanese word is frequently used in daily life, carries a similar tone of teasing or mild mockery, and aligns perfectly with the term's pragmatic usage in the original online environment. The primary translational goal is to enable target

audiences to rapidly grasp the term's connotative orientation and core definition, rendering the coherence rule superior to formal fidelity. Replacement with inherent target language vocabulary avoids rigid translations such as "被害者" (victim) that trigger semantic deviation, enhances textual coherence and readability, and guarantees communicative effects within target contexts.

Example 7

Original text: 佛系

Target text: マイペース

The term "佛系" (literally "Buddha-style") depicts young people's attitudes of rejecting rat races, following personal rhythms and embracing low-desire, relaxed lifestyles. Literal translation "仏系" (buddhist) easily evokes associations with religious Buddhist concepts among Japanese readers, deviating from the metaphorical connotation of online life attitudes. Guided by Skopos Theory, the domestication strategy replaces source imagery with well-established foreign-origin buzzword "マイペース" (my pace) prevalent in Japanese culture, which specifically refers to living at one's own pace without blind conformity to peer competition. This term specifically denotes a state of living at one's own pace rather than engaging in mindless, cutthroat competition. It aligns closely with the original text in both meaning and emotional tone, avoids religious connotations, accurately conveys the relaxed, stress-relieving mindset of contemporary youth, and achieves the communicative goal of fostering cross-cultural empathy. Adopting domesticating translation to render the source text with localized vocabulary yields fluent and natural expressions that align with the translation purpose. This approach effectively removes reading barriers caused by foreign cultures and strikes a balance between readability and faithfulness.

5. Conclusion

As vivid records of contemporary Chinese social mentalities and youth subcultures, the external translation of internet buzzwords transcends mere linguistic symbol conversion, evolving into a vital medium for constructing cross-cultural dialogue and narrating stories of Chinese youth. Drawing upon Skopos Theory and analyzing multiple typical cases, this paper identifies that the theory's core principle of "purposes determine translation methods" provides a clear operable decision-making framework for the external translation of internet buzzwords. The coherence rule guarantees readability and acceptability of target texts within target language contexts, while the fidelity rule safeguards the bottom line of source text semantics and emotional cores amid flexible adaptations. All strategic choices ultimately serve pre-set communicative purposes.

Examples of buzzword translations from the Japanese edition of People's China demonstrate that mature and effective translation for international audiences never relies on a single approach; instead, it flexibly adapts strategies based on the cultural load of the terms, the target audience, and the characteristics of the medium, seeking an optimal balance between cultural dissemination and audience comprehension.

In summary, the Japanese translation of internet buzzwords involves not only linguistic conversion, but also the docking of mental schemas and cultural cognition. In practical translation work, translators ought to abandon mechanical formal equivalence, establish communication-effect-oriented translational awareness, and balance accurate delivery of semantic information with target audiences' aesthetic habits and cognitive logic. Only in this way can cultural barriers be truly broken, enabling the temporal sentiments and youthful styles embedded in Chinese internet buzzwords to achieve effective dissemination and resonance within foreign cultural landscapes.

References

- [1] Vermeer, H. J. Skopos and Commission in Translation Action[M]. New York & London: Routledge, 1987.
- [2] Nord, C. Translating as a Purposeful Activity: Functionalist Approaches Explained[M]. Shanghai: Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press, 2001.
- [3] Zou, C. F. A Study on Japanese Translation of Chinese Internet Buzzwords from the Perspective of Eco-Translatology [J]. Japanese Language Education and Japanese Studies, 2018(00): 41-45.
- [4] Xu, Y. L. Research on the Translation and Communication of Internet Buzzwords[J]. New Perspective, 2025(847): 44-46.
- [5] Jiang, H. Q. Functionalism in Translation Studies: Skopos Theory[J]. Social Sciences Review, 2005(06): 247-249.
- [6] Hong, J. A Study on Japanese Translation of Chinese Internet Buzzwords from the Perspective of Functional Equivalence[J]. Modern Chinese, 2021(703): 82-86.