A Study on the English Translation of Network Buzzwords From the Perspective of Skopos Theory

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With the advent of the electronic age, a wide variety of network buzzwords are enjoying rising popularity. Network buzzwords often reflect the social culture of a country, so their accurate translation emerges as an urgent problem for translators to solve. Starting from the characteristics of network buzzwords, this paper explores the English translation of network buzzwords based on Skopos Theory, aiming at enabling target language readers to better understand the meaning of Chinese network buzzwords and narrow the cultural gap between the two countries.

Keywords: Skopos Theory, network buzzwords, translation approaches

Introduction

Nowadays, technology and network are developing at an alarming pace, and people are increasingly inseparable from the network. Through the network, people can read e-books, watch movies, and TV dramas. Meanwhile, the march of the internet has brought people one after another network buzzwords. As language is a mirror of culture, it serves as a bridge for communication between different cultures, so the translation of network buzzwords requires in-depth research (Xu, 2008, p. 57). If we search “network buzzwords” and “English translation” as key words in CNKI, we can find 155 relevant papers. In the light of current materials, the research on the English translation of network buzzwords mainly includes two aspects: The first one is researches about the guiding theories on the translation of network buzzwords; the second one is researches on translation strategies of network buzzwords. When it comes to the guiding theories, some papers use eco-translatology, cross cultural communication, or functional equivalence theory to study the English translation of network buzzwords. Although the theories used are different, they all aim at cultural output.

Skopos Theory

Skopos Theory was proposed by Hans Vermeer, one of the representatives of the German functional school, who believed that translation research should be free from the shackles of original-centeredness. Skopos Theory consists of three principles, namely, the principle of purpose, the principle of coherence, and the principle of fidelity. The most important one is the principle of purpose, which means translating from the perspective of the receiver of the target language. The principle of coherence means that the translated sentences are coherent, logical, acceptable, and readable, and the principle of fidelity means that interlingual
coherence can be achieved between the original text and the translated text. The principles of coherence and fidelity must be centered on the principle of purpose (Li, 2020, p. 178).

**The Characteristics of Network Buzzwords**

Network buzzwords have their own characteristics. Its first characteristic is timeliness. Every year, the year-end summary will be a big inventory of the buzzwords that appeared in the year. These buzzwords are born in various TV shows or big events that have attracted wide public attention. The second characteristic is entertainment. In today’s society, the internet is a platform for people to relax in their leisure time. A variety of entertainment tools are emerging, and one of them is network buzzwords, which often use partial tone to add humorous elements to language and bring a touch of fun to people’s lives. For example, people now use “冲鸭” instead of “冲呀”, “集美” instead of “姐妹”, which invariably relieves people’s life pressure and creates an entertaining atmosphere. The third characteristic is innovation. Contemporary young people are quick-thinking, imaginative, and eager to pursue new things, so they coin fresh and interesting words. Even a familiar word or phrase may change its meaning or nature and thus become another new word (Qi, 2014, p. 45). For example, “A4 waist” is used to describe a person with a slim waist, only as wide as A4 paper.

**English Translation Strategies of Network Buzzwords From the Perspective of Skopos Theory**

The English translation of network buzzwords needs to accurately convey their meanings to let the readers of the target language understand and appreciate Chinese culture. When translating Chinese network buzzwords, translators should have a thorough understanding of the original text and find the most suitable translation method to achieve a good effect of publicity.

**Literal Translation**

Literal translation is a method that preserves both the content and the form of the original text, especially preserves the image and cultural color to achieve formal equivalence (Y. Y. Xiao & G. S. Xiao, 2020, p. 87).

Example (1):

The original: 戏精

The term gained popularity in the second season of a youth-oriented variety show. Yu Shuxin, a contestant of the show, was nicknamed “戏精”, which means her facial expressions and movements are extremely dramatic. Through literal translation, the term can be translated into “drama queen” that is defined as an overly dramatic person, which fits very well with the source information and adheres to the principle of purpose, allowing target readers to understand the meaning of the original.

Example (2):

The original: 打工人

By the end of 2020, the term “打工人” had become popular, referring to anyone who does manual or skilled labor, whether they are bricklayers, office workers, or entrepreneurs, who can call themselves “laborers”. The term means what it literally means, so literal translation is used. According to the purpose principle and fidelity principle of Skopos Theory, it accurately expresses meaning and emotion through corresponding English words.
Free Translation

Free translation refers to the natural expression of the meaning of the source language and does not strictly follow the original word form. It breaks through the limitation of language structure to transmit original information, which helps achieve pragmatic equivalence to express the cultural information of the source language. Chinese people like to use rhetorical devices to create new concepts. In this case, we should discard the literal meaning and use the linguistic form that suits the target language readers to convey the meaning (Y. Y. Xiao & G. S. Xiao, 2020, p. 87).

Example (1):
The original: 凡尔赛

As is known to all, “凡尔赛” originally means the palace of the French aristocracy. Now, as a network buzzword, it has taken on a different meaning, referring to those who live a rich and luxurious life and casually reveal it through euphemisms or complaints. If it is literally translated as “Versailles”, it will fail to correctly express the information of the source language. But if translated as “humblebrag” meaning “to boast in a modest way”, which accurately delivers the meaning behind “Versailles”, it will conform to the principle of purpose and enable people to have a knowledge of Chinese network buzzwords. Therefore, the real meaning should be translated by means of free translation.

Example (2):
The original: 爷青回

“爷青回”, an abbreviation of “爷的青春回来了”, is usually used when a certain movie or TV program evokes nostalgia or memories of youth. “爷” here does not mean “grandfather” but a way of calling oneself today by young people. In order to give a precise implication of Chinese “爷青回” by Skopos Theory, on the basis of free translation, it is best to translate it into “My youth is making a comeback”. In this way, target readers can not only understand its meaning, but also catch humorous elements of the buzzword.

A Combination of Literal and Free Translation

In translation, sometimes a single strategy cannot convey the information of the source language in the most vivid way, so literal translation and free translation can be combined.

Example (1):
The original: 可盐可甜

Salt literally means a seasoning, and sweet means a taste like sugar and honey. “可盐可甜” means someone can be either cool or cute with a style that can change in a second. The translation “cool and cute” actually uses alliteration so that it can follow the principle of coherence. In addition, the original also uses alliteration, so the translation complies with the principle of fidelity.

Example (2):
The original: 我不要你觉得，我要我觉得

This sentence comes from a variety show “Chinese restaurant”, in which the actor Huang Xiaoming often shows his leadership when he runs the restaurant. He often says “我不要你觉得，我要我觉得”, which literally means “I don’t want ‘you think’, I want ‘I think’”. The core meaning of this sentence is that my opinion is more important than yours, so we just need to translate it into “I don’t care what you think. I only care what I think”, which conforms to fidelity principle of Skopos Theory.
Conclusion

The emergence and spread of network buzzwords have enriched people’s lives and their wide use shows that people keep up with fashion trends. Network buzzwords express the thoughts of speakers in a witty manner and put people in a humorous atmosphere of communication. The purpose of network buzzwords translation is to convert a popular Chinese expression into English expression without twisting the meaning of the original word. On the premise of following this principle, translators should continue to improve themselves to keep pace with the times, grasp the principle of purpose, coherence, and fidelity, and should not ignore the cultural meaning behind words. Only in this way can cultural exchanges be better realized (Sun & Liu, 2020, p. 88).

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