

Study of Cross-border E-commerce Translation from the Perspective of Skopos Theory

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Abstract

Since the reform and opening up, the exchanges between China and foreign countries have been expanding in lots of fields, and commercial trade has been developing continuously. How to make foreign commodities known to Chinese people is an urgent problem for China. However, China has adopted many effective translation strategies and skills for the translation of packaging instructions carried by overseas commodities. Because of that, this paper will analyze the Chinese-English translation of Amazon Cross-border E-commerce platform from the perspective of Skopos Theory, with the aim of helping to solve the problems encountered in the translation of Cross-border goods and promoting Cross-border E-commerce transactions.

Keywords

Skopos Theory; Translation; Cross-border E-commerce.

1. Preface

With the rapid development of the global economy, E-commerce has become a new business model pursued by the foreign trade industry. Thanks to the rapid growth of the Internet market, China's Cross-border E-commerce industry also maintains a high-speed growth trend, and its transaction scale keeps growing. In 2021, the import and export volume of Cross-border E-commerce in China was 1.98 trillion yuan, with an increase of 15%. And the export volume amounted to 1.44 trillion yuan, an increase of 24.5%. Cross-border E-commerce is a new trade model, which can allow trading entities belonging to different countries to conduct trade and payment settlement through internet, and then complete the transaction with the help of international logistics. The rise of Internet provides a platform for Cross-border electronic commerce to grow and develop. Based on this situation, commodities from different countries can go abroad, and globalization of trade is gradually taking shape. Under the guidance of the reform and opening-up policy, China has successfully integrated into the tide of global economic integration. In recent years, China has become a veritable import and export power. Cross-border E-commerce, as an important way of trade between China and foreign countries, has broken through the barriers of region, time, technology of traditional trade and accelerated the process of trade globalization. And the trade between different countries will inevitably involve the translation of commodities. Obviously, the translation of Cross-border trade commodities plays an extremely important role in the process of goods entering the world market, but in recent years, the development speed of Cross-border E-commerce translation has not kept up with that of Cross-border E-commerce. When some Cross-border E-commerce platforms promote goods, the translation of product promotion lacks standardization and professionalism, which easily leads to unnecessary misunderstanding and reduces buyers' desire to buy. [1] The research on Cross-border E-commerce translation can not only help the smooth progress of trade, but also provide reliable and scientific new ideas for Chinese commodities to go abroad in today's world.

2. Overview of Skopos Theory and the Summary of its Application

As a translation theory, Skopos Theory was put forward by German linguist Vermeer in 1970s. It plays an important role in functionalist translation theory. Its core idea is that all actions are based on purpose. That is to say, action is based on purpose. Translation is also an action, so it is also based on the purpose. Translators can combine various factors and adopt different translation measures and methods to achieve their own translation goals. In short, the purpose of translation determines the ways and means to achieve the purpose. Under the guidance of this theory, the translator can get rid of the perplexity of literal translation or free translation of the original text and concentrate on the translation purpose. Skopos theory holds that translation is not just a simple phenomenon of language conversion, so the study of translation can't rely solely on linguistics. There are two reasons for this: first, translation itself is not a simple phenomenon of language conversion; second, the linguistics of translation difficulties has not raised any real targeted questions [2].

Skopos Theory requires that the translation purpose should be the criterion when translating: the translation purpose determines the whole translation process. According to Vermeer's thought, the purpose of translation usually includes the following three kinds: the purpose of the translator, the communicative purpose of the translation and the purpose to be achieved by adopting a certain translation strategy. Generally speaking, "translation purpose" refers to the communicative purpose of the translated text formed after the end of translation. According to the Skopos Theory, the person who initiates translation activities is the decider of translation purpose. Such personnel will formulate a series of translation requirements according to their own needs and define the direction and scope of use of the translation by communicating with the translator, so that the translation can better meet their own needs. In Vermeer's view, "the purpose of translation" has three meanings, respectively refers to the purpose of translation process, the function of the translation and the way of translation.

3. Case Studies of Cross-border E-commerce Translation from the Perspective of Skopos Theory

3.1. Skopos Rule

The basic premise of translation activities, according to Skopos Theory, is the principle of purpose. The expectations of readers are the emphasis of translation, which is based on the target language's content and culture. The behavior of translation is determined by its goal. According to Vermeer, the purpose of translation usually includes the following three kinds: the purpose of the interpreter, the communicative purpose of the translation and the purpose to be achieved by adopting a certain translation strategy. In other words, the social and cultural factors of the target language are the basis of the communicative effect of the translation on readers. This step of translation plays an important role in Cross-border E-commerce trade. From the perspective of Skopos Theory, translators should pay attention to the function of the source language text, that is, the purpose of the source language text. Through this step, we can attract buyers of the E-commerce platform, so as to achieve the purpose of increasing the sales of goods. The translation of E-commerce platform is for buyers to better understand the performance and efficacy of goods and enhance their trust in E-commerce platform, so choose what kind of translation should be subjected to the needs of the buyers. In other words, the translation must conform to the reading habits of the targeted readers. In addition, due to the differences in cultural backgrounds between the buyer and the seller, the opinions and views of the buyers and the sellers may be quite different for the same kind of commodity. When confronted with such problems, the translator should skillfully use the Skopos Theory, so as to avoid the cultural conflicts due to their respective cultural differences.

Case one:

Origin text: Vitamin-enriched and energizing non-oily moisturizer wakens and uplifts dull, fatigued skin. This facial recovery accelerator helps skin resist the effects of environmental stress for a healthy, invigorated appearance.

译文: 富含维他命的配方, 无油保湿, 唤醒疲惫肌肤, 改善暗沉肤色; 这款“面部修复加速器”帮助肌肤抵抗外部环境压力的影响, 恢复肌肤健康活力。

Analysis: This case is taken from the English introduction of Kiehl's Men's Moisturizing Lotion in Amazon English. Based on the thinking of Skopos Theory and the premise of understanding the psychology of Chinese and western consumers, the translator should make it clear that the translation is to make Chinese consumers better understand the products and promote the sales of commodities. Because this text bears the nature of commercial advertisement, we should integrate consumers' psychology, adopt some vivid languages, and let the target readers (consumers) have higher expectations for the functions of the goods, so as to further enhance their desire to buy. In addition, the six-character sentences are often used in Chinese to emphasize something and make sentences more rhythmed, while English language is more objective and accurate. In the original text, “healthy” and “invisible” are adjectives, but in order to adapt to the reading habits of Chinese consumers, the translator treats them as nouns “健康和活力”. In addition, the word order of the translation “for a healthy, invisible appearance” omits the preposition “for” and turns it directly into the verb “恢复”, which also accords with the “preposition hiding method” in translation.

Case Two:

Original text: Formulated with stable ingredient Activated C, effectively target excess melanin with 5 actions: neutralizes, breaks down, prevents, interrupts and decreases melanin production. Patented Proxylane to stimulate collagen production and strengthen collagen network to reduce melanin leakage, for a plumped and radiant complexion. Dermatologist recommended, hydrating gentle formula, suitable for sensitive skin.

译文: 蕴含高稳定活性维他C, 5重对抗黑色素, 有中效中和、抑制、分解、截击及预防黑色素。配合专利成分玻色因促进胶原蛋白新生, 强化肌底原网络, 抑制黑色素沉淀, 肌肤更剔透弹嫩有光泽。皮肤科医生医学级成分, 保湿温和配方, 敏感肌适用。

Analysis: This case is also taken from the website of Kiehl's Amazon official website. The advertising text in this paragraph is a concrete description of Kiehl's Whitening Essence. As this paragraph is a description of the ingredients and efficacy of this whitening product, it aims to increase consumers' understanding of this product and thus enhance consumers' desire to buy through product description. Whether the translation of the product description can properly meet the consumer demands of the target language customers is the key to win consumers' favor. Therefore, attention should also be paid to the purposeful principle in translation. In this example, “patented proxy lane to stimulate collaboration production and strengthened collaboration network to reduce Melanie leakage”, The words “Patented Proxylanefor” was translated into “配合专利成分玻色因” which is an effective addition translation based on comprehension, thus making the language of this sentence more vivid and easy for target customers to understand. In addition, “for a plumped and radiant complex” is also treated as “肌肤更剔透弹嫩有光泽”. The words here in the original sentence are not only translated directly, but also the reading habits of the target language readers are fully taken into account, which explains the deep meaning of the sentence as well.

Case Three:

Original Text: This next-generation formula delivers a rush of liquid energy advanced with NEW serum-strength, visible youth-boosting benefits. Infused with Miracle Broth™, a new discovery shows it helps boost skin's oxygen capacity to help generate vital energy to fuel renewal. Its Active Liquid Hydrogel texture cushions on contact and penetrates rapidly to deliver sustained all-day hydration. Lines and wrinkles appear diminished, and a firmer feel is revealed for a look that's radiantly youthful.

译文: 新一代配方为肌肤倾更澎湃的业态能量, 带来全新精华级修护力量及显著赋活年轻的效能, 一滴, 为肌肤注入新生命。糅合 Miracle Broth™ 活肤精华, 经研究证实能帮助提升肌肤含氧量, 为更生程序制造所需能量。活性水凝啫喱于涂抹瞬间垫护肌肤并迅速渗透, 提供持续一整天的**渊源水润**。细纹皱纹淡退, 肌肤倍感紧致, 展现年轻光彩。

Analysis: This case is taken from the website of LA MER Amazon official website. More exaggerate words and beautiful rhyme are preferred by Chinese customers because Chinese consumers have very different thinking patterns and reading habits compared with the western ones. In the original sentence, "Lines and wrinkles appear diminished, and a firmer feel is revealed for a look that's radiantly youthful" is translated into "细纹皱纹淡退, 肌肤倍感紧致, 展现年轻光彩". Here the six-character phrases are used to make the sentence rhythmed and also emphasize the efficacy of the product. The words used satisfied the customers' expectation for the product and stimulate their desire to buy. And there is a professional term "Miracle Broth™" in the original text, which was also dealt with in a proper way. The translator added some words to explain what it is, which made customers who lacks professional knowledge have a basic understanding of it.

3.2. Fidelity Rule

In Skopos Theory, the concept of faithfulness necessitates that the original text and the translated text have interlingual coherence, meaning that the translated text should be related to the original text and be faithful to the original text to some extent. As Baker pointed out, "the translator ... should make the target text and the original text coherent in meaning." The faithfulness and concrete forms of the translation, on the other hand, are determined by the purpose of translation and the translator's understanding of the original text. Therefore, according to the principle of faithfulness in Skopos theory, translators have greater subjectivity and higher right of choice than before. In other words, the translator's subjectivity is recognized, and the status of the translator and the original author tends to be equal. Within the scope of Cross-border E-commerce, the faithfulness of translation is closely related to the sales volume of goods. For this purpose, the translator is bound to play a more important role.

Case one:

Origin text: iPad Air does more than a computer in simple, magic ways. And with advanced features and capabilities, it's more versatile than ever.

译文: 许多电脑能做的事, iPad Air可以做的更简单、更巧妙。现在, 众多新功能和特性的加入, 还让它的用法更加多样。

Analysis: This text is a brief introduction of iPad. iPad is a kind of digital product, so the translation of such products should pay attention to the accuracy of product performance. From the translation part, the author has adjusted the word order and omitted some expressions. For example, in the first sentence, the translator directly advances the computer of the comparative object, while in the other sentence, the subject is iPad. Moreover, the words "in simple, magic ways" is translated into "做的更简单、更巧妙". This not only preserves the meaning of the

original text and abides by the principle of faithfulness, but also conforms to the reading habits of the target language readers. Secondly, the translator didn't translate the sentence "it's more versatile than ever" literally, but translated it into "还让它的用法更加多样". This kind of processing can not only follow the text, but also cleverly avoid translationese. The meaning of "versatile" is also well reflected. In these two sentences, the translator fully embodies the translator's subjectivity based on the principle of faithfulness, and the translation skills used for commodity information are flexible and pragmatic.

Case two:

Origin text: Stronger, brighter today. Younger-looking eyes tomorrow. Inspired by microbiome science, our iconic Advanced Génifique Yeux eye cream now have millions of prebiotic and probiotic fractions concentrated in one patented formula providing essential nutrients for the skin of eye contour.

译文: 双眸更强韧, 更明亮, 看起来更年轻。启发自微生态科研, Génifique 发光眼霜中蕴含过百万的益生元和益生菌萃取物, 浓缩于专利配方中, 为眼周肌肤提供必要的微生态营养素。

Analysis: The text of this case is taken from Lancôme Advanced Génifique Yeux eye cream. When translating the text, the translator obviously added or deleted the text from the overall consideration, but it doesn't mean that the translator didn't adhere to the principle of faithfulness well, instead, we can see the translator's unique understanding of "faithfulness" in these processing steps. For example, the sentence "Stronger, brighter today. Younger-looking eyes tomorrow." was not translated into "双眸更强韧, 更明亮, 看起来更年轻." Obviously, though the words "today" and "tomorrow" had been deleted, the core meaning of the sentence has been conveyed and the sentence become more concise. As for the word "concentrated", the translator selected carefully and pick the word "浓缩", which is more commonly used in Chinese and more faithful and coherent.

Case three:

Origin text: This cooling gel delivers soothing moisture for a refreshed feel. Skin looks naturally vibrant, restored to its healthiest center. Miracle Broth™ – the legendary healing elixir that flows through all of La Mer – infuses skin with sea-sourced renewing energies. Ideal for combination / oilier skin. Pat a small, pea-sized, amount between fingertips to release the Miracle Broth™ and press gently into cleansed skin, morning and night.

译文: 清凉的啫喱提供舒缓镇静的水润修护, 焕发清醒气息。肌肤展现自然亮泽, 回复最健康平衡之初。作为所有 La Mer 产品核心的传奇修复成分 Miracle Broth™ 活肤精华, 为肌肤倾注海洋的更生力量, 适合混合性/油性肌肤使用。早晚洁面后, 沾取如豆状的少量面霜并于指尖展开, 释放配方中的 Miracle Broth™ 活肤精华, 随后轻按于肌肤。

Analysis: The text of this case is taken from La Mer. Cosmetic instructions belong to scientific text and La Mer is famous for its herbs and natural elements in its products, so the translator thinks that the translation should be concise, objective as well as accurate. In the practice, he/she translates the meaning of the instruction and adds proper details to make the text more understandable for customers, which properly embodies the Fidelity rule. Besides, "small, pea-sized amount" is translated into "如豆状的少量面霜". It is very necessary to tell customers the right usage of skin care products and the correct amount they use, for these will affect the efficacy of the product and their experience. What's more, If the translator did not translate the "pat" and "press" correctly, the customer might take the wrong way to use the product and finally cause damage to their skins.

3.3. Coherence Rule

The principle of coherence in Skopos Theory requires that the translation provided by the translator must be fluent and coherent and conform to the contextual logic. In other words, readability and acceptability of the text are necessary for the translation. Besides, the translation should be understood by its users in the target culture. There are great differences between Chinese and western language habits and usages, and thinking and habits are the main factors. On the Cross-border E-commerce platform, whether the translation given by the translator can be accepted by the consumers in the target language directly affects the customers' impression and purchase desire of the product in that country. Therefore, in the selection of translation, the usage habits and consumption psychology of the target language users should be fully taken into account, and a fluent and coherent translation conforming to the reading habits of consumers should be given.

Case one:

Origin text: The thinnest, lightest Kindle Paperwhite yet—with a flush-front design and 300 ppi glare-free display that reads like real paper even in bright sunlight. Now waterproof, so you're free to read and relax at the beach, by the pool, or in the bath.

译文: 全新Kindle Paperwhite, 更轻薄, 300ppi超清纯平电子墨水屏, 带来媲美纸书的阅读体验, 强光下仍可清晰阅读。全新Kindle Paperwhite具备防水溅功能。您可以轻松享受在水边自在阅读——例如沙滩上、泳池旁或浴室里等。

Analysis: This paragraph is taken from the introduction of Amazon kindle reader. Chinese and English have different writing habits, so when translating English into Chinese, we should make the translation conform to the reading habits of Chinese readers. So, in order to write more smoothly, the translator can change the word order. We can find that the translator has combine the meaning of "thinnest, lightest" and translated into "轻薄" in Chinese, which also makes the translation have a unique rhythmical charm. Besides, as for the sentence "...reads like real paper even in bright sunlight", Instead of sticking to the structure of the original text, the translator divided it into two sentences. This is in line with the common Chinese habit of using short sentences and paying less attention to the structure. The second sentence is a typical omitted sentence pattern, which should be added as a complete one "Now the new product is waterproof, so you're free to read and relax at the beach, by the pool, or in the bath." Therefore, the translator completes the information when translating, which can effectively avoid misunderstanding for Chinese consumers. In the last sentence, the translator didn't translate the information directly, but made a supplementary summary on the basis of understanding, because no matter the beach, swimming pool and bathroom, these places are close to the water source. Therefore, from this point of view, adding some details is also a good method to offer better translation.

Case two:

Origin text: NESCAFÉ GOLD BLEND® Coffee uses selected Arabica coffee beans. With the use of breakthrough technology – MAC (Micronized Added Coffee), the true taste of coffee beans is well-preserved. The small granules remaining at the bottom of the cup is the evidence of a true roast and ground coffee. With 135g, 90g and 30g sizes available.

译文: 全新雀巢金牌咖啡, 严选最优质的阿拉比卡咖啡豆, 以创新MAC (Micronized Added Coffee)微研磨咖啡技术, 将原粒咖啡豆研磨成微细颗粒, 并均匀封存于金牌咖啡当中, 让研磨咖啡至醇至真的馥郁原香尽然释放, 享受极致升华。每粒存留于杯内的小颗粒, 就是研磨咖啡享受的真醇印记! 备有135克、90克及30克以供选择。

Analysis: This case is taken from the introduction of Nestle Gold Coffee on Amazon platform. When translating such commercial advertisement introduction terms, we should not only pay attention to faithfulness, but also consider the fluency and coherence of the language, otherwise it will lead to obstacles for consumers to understand, thus affecting the sales of products. And the sentence “With the use of breakthrough technology – MAC (Micronized Added Coffee), the true taste of coffee beans is well-preserved.” was not translated directly, but preserved the word MAC (Micronized Added Coffee) and made a brief explanation. In addition, “the true taste of coffee beans is well-preserved” was also added some explanations which not only made the text more readable but took the reading habits of Chinese customers as well. Finally in the sentence “The small granules remaining at the bottom of the cup is the evidence of a true roast and ground coffee.”, the word “evidence” has also been skillfully handled by the translator as the word “印记”, which is more in line with the language habits of this kind of text and enhances the coherence of the article.

Case three:

Origin text: Amino Acid and Coconut Oil derived cleansers are combined to create a delightful, creamy lather that gently yet thoroughly cleanses the hair. Wheat Proteins and Wheat Starch help add body and fullness while a special blend of moisturizing ingredients imparts softness and shine. Suitable for all hair and scalp types when mildness is desired.

译文: 此独特配方蕴含丝质氨基酸及椰子油, 能揉出丰富幼滑的泡沫, 温和而彻底地洗净头发及头皮。小麦蛋白质及小麦淀粉质能令修复更浓密丰盈, 特别调配的滋润成分则令发质如丝般柔软, 时刻绽放靓丽光泽。适合所有发质及头皮使用, 亦适合经常洗发并需要温和洗发水的人士使用。

Analysis: This case is also taken from the website of Kiehl’s Amazon official website. Coherence Rule requires that the translated version must conform to the reading habits of targeted readers, which means the translator should fully take into consideration the differences between the two languages. And there are many long sentences in English languages. If they are to be translated into Chinese, then the long sentences should be divided into several short sentences. For example, the sentence in the original text “Wheat Proteins and Wheat Starch help add body and fullness while a special blend of moisturizing ingredients imparts softness and shine” was translated into “小麦蛋白质及小麦淀粉质能令修复更浓密丰盈, 特别调配的滋润成分则令发质如丝般柔软, 时刻绽放靓丽光泽”. The words “Softness” and “shine” was added more details when translating, and the translated version conforms more to the reading habits of Chinese customers.

4. Conclusion

With China’s further opening up, more and more Chinese products will go abroad. As Chinese goods enter the international market, translation plays an increasingly important role. Applying the three principles of Skopos Theory can not only make the translation faithful to the original text, but also take care of the translation purpose and the coherence of the text. The three principles complete each other and jointly help Cross-border E-commerce translation as well as improve the translation quality of texts. Cross-border E-commerce translation differs from other texts in that the words used are more rigorous and accurate, which requires translators to understand the original text accurately when translating, and because of the promotion purpose, the purpose of translation is also a factor that translators should consider comprehensively. In the research of Cross-border E-commerce translation, Skopos Theory is of great significance to Cross-border E-commerce translation. From the perspective of Skopos Theory, translators should pay attention to the functions of the source language text when

translating. From the three principles of Skopos Theory, the translator should always keep in mind the dual purposes of serving the target audience and product promotion, fully consider the cultural background and needs of the audience, and flexibly use translation skills, methods and strategies to convey the necessary and correct information to consumers on the E-commerce platform. Translators should also keep in mind the principle of Skopos Theory and respect the cultural differences between China and the West to produce efficient translations for Cross-border E-commerce, thus achieving the purposes of sales promotion.

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