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A Contrastive Study of Two English Versions of Tao De Ching from the Perspective of Skopos Theory

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Abstract

This study, under the guidance of Skopos theory, the translation strategies of cultural loaded words in the two translations are compared and analyzed to explore the impact on the target language readers, and in an attempt to summarize what measures should be adopted to minimize or avoid the translation errors of culture-loaded words. This study adopts the quantitative analysis method to compare and analyze the English translations of the Tao Te Ching by Waley and Zhao Yanchun, taking the three principles of Skopos theory as the guide, and selecting the cultural loaded words in the original language culture and the corresponding translations in the target language text as the objects of study. Through the analysis, the paper finds that from the perspective of Skopos theory, the two translators, although translating the same text, have different personal backgrounds, and their translation strategies are very different. Therefore, when translating Chinese cultural classics, translators should be clear about the goal of spreading Chinese culture and choose strategies, techniques, and methods that the reader will accept, which will tell a good Chinese story and spread Chinese culture better.

Keywords: *Chinese cultural classics, Tao Te Ching, Skopos Theory.*

Introduction

Chinese cultural classics, with their rich cultural connotations have an extensive and profound influence and contributions to the fields such as history, philosophy, literature, science, technology, and military. They also play a role in foreign cultural exchange and cooperation through translation. As the Chinese classic with the greatest number of foreign translations and the and most significant number of copies distributed abroad, Tao Te Ching is the most translated and distributed text abroad (Liu & Xin, 2020). As one of the most influential Chinese cultural classics, Tao Te Ching is thought to be written by Lao Tzu (or Laozi, Laotse) around the 600 to 400BC. Lao Tzu illustrated his ideology about the Way of Nature in 81 chapters involving with the most abstruse universe and the deepest illustrations of the reality. Consisting of 5000 Chinese characters with aphorisms and illustrations, it contains the suggestive and enlightening wisdom. Its wisdom refer to many fields such as politics, governance, education, management, morals, etc. Although its sayings are short and not enough articulated, many writers, artists, politicians, and even religious thinkers have taken Tao Te Ching as the foundation of inspiration. In recent times, Western countries have been scrambling to find the wisdom motivation for sustainable national development in Chinese Taoist texts. The translation and study of Laozi's thought has become a trend in international sinology circles. The scholarly community even regards the number of translations versions and research results of the

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Tao Te Ching as an important criterion for measuring the development of Chinese studies in a country (Liu & Xin, 2020). Therefore, taking the English translation of Tao Te Ching as an example is significant in translation studies.

Skopos theory is one of the most important translation theories of the functional theory , which was proposed by the German functional translator Hans.J. Vermeer in the 1970s. The theoretical basis of the Skopos theory is the behavior theory, which believes that translation as an action, its translation method and strategy depend on the purpose or commission of translation. The Skopos theory believes that the translation process should follow three principles, namely, the Skopos rule, the coherence rule and the fidelity rule. The Skopos rule refers to the timely adjustment of translation methods and translation strategies according to the context to which the translation is applied, the reading needs of the audience and the role played by the translation; the principle of coherence emphasizes the coherence between the translation and the target language, the acceptance and comprehension of the audience; the principle of fidelity emphasizes the transfer and transmission of information within the interlanguage, which believes that the original text and the translation are not two isolated texts, and in terms of information, the source of information in the translated text depends on the original text. Generally speaking, the purpose of translation refers to the communicative purpose of the translation, that is, the communicative function of the translation to the readers of the translated language in the social background culture and context of the translated language (Venuti, 2000). Unlike the traditional principle of translation based on equivalence, under the principle of Skopos, a translation does not have to be completely "faithful and equivalent" to the source text, as long as it achieves the intended purpose of the translation (Bian, 2008). Thus, under the functional Skopos framework, the principle of fidelity is subordinate to the principle of coherence, and both the principle of coherence and the principle of fidelity are subordinate to the principle of Skopos (Bian, 2008).

This study is conducted on the contrastive study of two English versions of Tao De Ching from the perspective of Skopos theory, attempts to find the proper way to guide the English translation of Chinese cultural classics.

Application of Skopos Theory in Translation Practice

Translation is a communicative act, and the whole process of translation practice activity depends on the most important realization of the overall translation act, i.e. the Skopos determines the translation procedures and strategies (Nord, 2001) The principle of Skopos requires the translation can play an important role in accordance with the target readers' expected way in the target culture. The result-oriented approach suggests that the purpose determines the entire act of translation. Under the guidance of the principle of Skopos, the translator adopts corresponding translation strategies and methods to deal with the differences between the translated text and the original text flexibly, which facilitates the understanding of the readers of the translated language (Chen, 2016). This paper selects the translation version of the Tao Te Ching by Arthur Waley and Zhao Yanchun and compares and analyzes the translation strategies of culturally loaded words in the two translations under the guidance of Skopos theory, explores the cultural gains and losses caused by different translation strategies and their effects on the target language readers, and summarizes what measures should be taken to minimize or avoid the translation errors of culturally loaded words.

Cultural Loaded Words

Eugene Nida (2015) proposed the concept of cultural load words，the concept is divided into five categories: ecological culture, material culture, social culture, religious culture and linguistic culture. The term "ecological culture" refers to words related to nature and ecology, such as environment, climate, flora and fauna. Material culture load words refer to words related to social material life, such as production tools, transportation ,food and clothing. The material culture-loaded words refer to the words related to the material life

of the society, such as production tools, transportation , food and clothing; the social culture-loaded words refer to the words related to the social. Religious culture-loaded words refer to myths and legends, religious beliefs and other value system-related vocabulary. Language and culture load words refer to words related to cultural heritage such as classical poetry with national characteristics. Culture-loaded words refer to phrases and idioms that are unique to a particular culture and reflect the distinctive ways of activity of a specific nationality that been gradually accumulated over a long period. Chinese culture-loaded words are the builders of Chinese culture.

Characteristics of Culture-loaded Words and Principles of Translation

Culture-loaded words have gradually formed their own unique characteristics through long-term development and is a product of the development of China's multi-ethnic language cohesion, with the characteristics of national uniqueness. For translation, the form of our written language is simple and concise, and the meanings conveyed are rich, and some words cannot be translated word by word in the process of translation exactly according to the literal meaning of the words. Therefore, when translating culture-loaded words, we should clarify and follow the following principles due to their ethnicity and translation inequality.

When translating culture-loaded words, It is important not to exaggerate or deviate from the context of the language expression. The reason is that when translating culture-loaded words, many words have similar meanings, but when combined with the context, the similar words cannot fully express the current meaning. Therefore, in the process of translation, it is necessary to fully understand and convey the ideas, and adopt a more appropriate and closer translation.

Culture-loaded words are simple in form, but rich in meaning. Therefore, in the process of translating culture-loaded words, we should not be limited by the expression form of culture-loaded words, but should be as concise as possible and focus on the meaning of the word, so that the readers of the translation can clearly understand the meanings expressed by the language conversion.

During the translation process of culture-loaded words in linguistic communication, a part of the expression has multiple meanings, and it is difficult to make people understand the real meaning of the word through its surface meaning. Therefore, in the process of translating culture loaded words, it is necessary to analyze the implied meanings conveyed by the words and translate the multiple implied meanings in the translation process.

Problems with the translation of culture- loaded words

The importance of correct translation of culture-loaded words in Chinese literature, is particularly important in the modern era when translation is turning to the cultural dimension and in the context of globalization, where cultural exchanges are becoming increasingly close. The Tao Te Ching, an essential work in the history of Chinese philosophy, has profoundly influenced the formation of Chinese culture. The Tao Te Ching is generally considered to embody the essence of Chinese philosophy. In the 1950s and 1960s, Western translation studies shifted to the linguistic level, and in the 1970s, translation shifted to the cultural level.

The Tao Te Ching is an important source of Taoist philosophical thought. It was written by Laozi (Laozi), the first 37 chapters are "Taojing" and the last 44 chapters are "Dejing", which is the first complete philosophical work in Chinese history. The ideas of Laozi, as the source of Taoist thought, have had a great influence on traditional culture and have had a significant impact on the cultural structure of the Chinese people. His thoughts have not only influenced philosophy, politics, sociology, poetics, political science, sociology, and poetics, but also in education, politics, law, economics, and logic.

Translation of linguistic and culture- load words

Linguistic and culture-loaded words are those that carry the phonological, grammatical and formal features of a particular language group. English and Chinese are from different language families, English belongs to the Indo-European family and Chinese belongs to the Sino-Tibetan family. Chinese is parataxis and concrete. English is an abstract and alphabetic language, with focus on hypotaxis.

(1) 执大象，天下往。（Chapter35）

Waley：He who holding the Great Form goes about his work in the empire.

Zhao Yanchun: The Great Image if you hold, all will come to you, young and old.

English is a hypotaxis language and the subject cannot be omitted, while Chinese is an ideographic language, the subject is often omitted, especially in an ancient Chinese. The above example is a typical example of subject omission. The meaning of this sentence is that as long as the ruler has mastered the Tao, then the whole world will follow him. And combined with the context, Waley uses the third person as the subject, he means that if somebody who hold the Tao, can his work in the empire. While Zhao Yanchun uses the first person as the subject, which means that if you hold the Tao, all will come to you, he then explains all includes young and old. Compared with the two translation versions, although there is a small difference with the meaning of the source text, it is still a good translation of the semantics of the source text.

Religious culture is one of the important human cultures. Almost every social group has its own religious beliefs. Religious culture loaded words are those words and phrases that carry the specific religious traditions of a linguistic group. When dealing with translations involving religious words, one should take the religious culture of the source text into consideration.

(2) 道

Waley: Way

Zhao Yanchun: Way

The word “Tao” appears 74 times throughout Laozi's work, indicating its centrality to his philosophy. There are three primary interpretations of the word "tao": To begin, there is the metaphysical reality, or the ultimate cause from which all things in the universe emerge. For starters, it's where everything came from; for another, it encompasses the rules by which everything in the universe occurs, evolves, and travels; and finally, it's the foundation of human society's norms and regulations. Waley use mostly phonetic translations of “Tao” as “Tao” to preserve its spiritual essence while maintaining this core. While Zhao Yanchun uses translation of “Tao” as “Word”. The use of a paraphrase to translate The translation of "way" into different words reflects, to a certain extent, the multiple cultural meanings of "way". This reflects to some extent the multiple cultural meanings of "Tao", especially when "Tao" is translated as way(s), western religious elements have already penetrated, not only introducing the Chinese "Tao" to the west, but also maintains the "original flavor" of the Way, which plays an important role in the exchange and dissemination of culture. In Western culture, the word "Way" carries heavy religious connotations. Many Western scholars have used the word "way" for deeply rooted religious and cultural reasons in their various English translations of the Tao Te Ching.

(3) 道生一，一生二，二生三，三生万物。（Chapter42）

Waley: Tao gave birth to the One, the One gave birth successively to two things, three things, up to ten thousand (i.e. everything).

Zhao Yanchun: The Word begets one, one begets two, two begets three, and three beget everything.

Numbers appear more frequently in the Tao Te Ching and have religious cultural meaning. The terms "one," "two," and "three" in this context do not refer to exact numbers or specific things. In fact, "one," "two" and "three" together represent represent the process of change of all things from nothing to something, which is also a very important concept in the Tao Te Ching. It is also a very important concept in the Tao Te Ching. Here, “One” refers to Qi, two refers to Yin and Yang, three refers to everything in the world. Zhao Yanchun translates "one", "two" and "three" into specific numbers, while Waley translates "one" into "One", capitalizing the initial letter to conceptualize them, which is in line with the concept of numbers in the Tao Te Ching and the thought of Laozi.

Socio-cultural load words are words or phrases that carry certain social customs, ways of life and behavior.

(4) **知其雄，守其雌。**（chapter 28）

Waley: He who knows the male, yet cleaves to what is female.

Zhao Yanchun: Knowing it is a male, you keep the frail.

Chinese culture has a long history and many words have changed in meaning. This requires the translator to correctly understand the classical cultural vocabulary and to accurately reproduce their historical meanings. In this sentence, male and female do not simply refer to two different states of being. They refer to two different states. The former refers to rigidity and strength, and the latter refers to softness and weakness. Waley's direct translation of these two words as Male and Female, which is obviously illogical. Although Zhao Yanchun translates the word as “male”, he translates it as “frail”, to explain the real meaning.

Ecocultural load words are cultural terms that reflect a language group's natural, geographical, and other environmental features.

(5) **吉事尚左，凶事尚右。偏将**军居左，上将军居右。(chapter 31)

Waley: .....

Zhao Yanchun: Good omens are on the left side, and a general on the right; a chief of staff is on the left side, and a general on the right. Waley omits the translation of these two sentences, causing a serious linguistic and cultural deficit. Bassnet (2004) who has pointed out that "the translator cannot be the author of the source text, but rather a person who is responsible for the reader of the target language. When the significance of this statement is truly realized, there is no doubt that Waley's translation is, at least in this case, an irresponsible one.

The English Translation of the Tao Te Ching Guided by the Skopos Theory

From Skopos theory, Waley and Zhao Yanchun had different starting points when they translated the Tao Te Ching. Waley did it to pave the way for missionary work in China, while Zhao Yanchun did it to spread Chinese culture and reflections on Chinese philosophy and Taoist culture. In a sense, both bridged the gap between the two for the spread of Chinese culture. The study will analyze some typical translations of the Tao Te Ching in terms of the Skopos rule, intratextual coherence rule and intertextual coherence rule respectively.

Skopos Rule

Although they are both translating the Tao Te Ching, given their different identities, native languages, cultural backgrounds and translation purposes, Zhao Yanchun and

Waley's respective positions are different, the versions of translations are naturally different.

Source text: **其政**闷闷，其民淳淳；其政察察，其民缺缺。（chpater 58）

Waley: When the ruler looks depressed the people will be happy and satisfied; When the ruler looks lively and self-assured the people will be carping and discontented.

Zhao Yanchun: When the polity is obtuse, the masses are simple; when the polity is acute, the masses are crafty.

The source text "**其政**闷闷" is a unique four-character form in Chinese, and no corresponding word or phrase can be found in the translation into English, so both waley and Zhao Yanchun deal with it as a sentence during the translation. In addition, the four-character frame contains "superimposed" structures, such as "**淳淳**", "**察察**", "**缺缺**". Waley translate it as "the people will be happy and satisfied", to explain the meaning of the words; Zhao Yanchun adopts the repeated sentence like "When.....", "the masses are....." to achieve the equivalence between the source text and the target text.

Intratextual Coherence Rule

Intratextual coherence rule emphasizes the logical coherence of the context of the translation and the contextual background. In this respect, Waley and Zhao Yanchun cope with it differently. For instance, in the chapter2 "**天下皆知美之**为美，斯恶已；皆知善之为善，斯不善矣。故有无相生，难易相成，长短相形，高下相倾，音声相和，前后相随。是以圣人处无为之事，行不言之教" The sage approaches the world from the viewpoint of inaction, and teaches by not speaking. From the "**美**" and "恶", "**善**" and "**不善**"to introduce the "难" and "**易**", "长" and "**短**", "**高**" and "**下**" and the method of comparison between ontology and comparator. The logic between the lines is tight, and the context is coherent and well-connected.

Waley: It is because every one under Heaven recognizes beauty as beauty, that the idea of ugliness exists. And equally if every one recognized virtue as virtue, this would merely create fresh conceptions of wickedness. For truly 'Being and Not-being grow out of one another'. Difficult and easy complete one another. Long and short test one another; High and low determine one another. Pitch and mode give harmony to one another. Front and back give sequence to one another. Therefore the Sage relies on actionless activity. Carries on wordless teaching.

Zhao Yanchun: All the word know beauty is beauty, because of ugliness; all know goodness is goodness, because of non-goodness, what is nil and what is being generate each other, what is difficult and what is easy beget each other; what is long and what is short contrast each other; what is high and what is low complement each other; what is sound and what is voice attune each other; what is front and what is rear follow each other. This is what is eternal. Therefore, the sages leave thhings as they are. They teach without inculcation, let things arise instead of raising them.

From Waley's translation version, we can see that , waley uses the "being and not-being", "difficult and easy" , "long and short" and "therefore" to connect with the sentence, making readers understand the context of the source text at a glance. On the contrary, Zhao Yanchun treats the relationship in the first paragraph as condition and result, he uses "because of " and "therefore" to connect the sentence. It fully reflects the cause and effect, the coherence of the context, and the connection between sentences.

Intertextual Coherence Rule

Intertextual coherence rule emphasizes the principles of translation that should be observed between different languages, maximizing the use of expressions that are culturally acceptable to the target language. The study analysis the chapter 25 "人法地，地法天，天法道，道法自然 " The two different translation versions as followings:

Waley: The ways of men are conditioned by those of earth. The ways of earth, by those of heaven. The ways of heaven by those of Tao, and the ways of Tao by the Self-so (the 'unconditioned'; the 'what-is-so-of-itself').

Zhao Yanchun: Man is modeled on Earth, Earth on Heaven, Heaven on the Word, and the Word on Nature.

Laozi mainly expresses that man is subject to earth, earth is subject to heaven, heaven is subject to Tao, and Tao is subject to the logic of the universe, and Tao, heaven, earth and man are all phenomena on different levels. In Waley's translation, he uses "conditioned", and Zhao uses "modeled" to express the "法" in the source text, and it is easy for readers to accept it.

Conclusion

In conclusion, as China's comprehensive power increases, the promotion of Chinese cultural classics is receiving much attention. Tao Te Ching an irreplaceable classics, has been translated in numerous ways. In this paper, only some typical cases of Waley and Zhao Yanchun's translations are selected for analysis, and their guiding effect on translation activities can be derived by combining the three rules of Skopos theory, i.e., translation activities follow certain purposes. As Zuo (2013) suggests, the translation of the ancient Chinese version of the Tao Te Ching in modern English is not only a contest of cultural values between the source language and the target language, but also a reproduction of differences in the way of thinking. Therefore, when translating Chinese cultural texts, translators should clarify the purpose of cultural dissemination and appropriately choose the translation strategies, techniques and methods that meet the reader's acceptance in order to better tell the Chinese story and spread Chinese culture.

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