Study of the English Translation of Chinese Tea’s Names from the Perspective of Skopos Theory

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Abstract

Chinese tea culture has a long history. It is not only symbolize the characteristic of tea but also reflects lots of local customs and culture. In recent years, with the rapid growth of Chinese tea export, it is gradually favored by foreign visitors. However, the English version of Chinese tea’s names are uneven. The target text isn’t equivalent to the source text which made foreigners cannot get the implications of tea’s names. For this reason, it will block the cross-cultural communication of Chinese tea products and culture. Skopos theory points out that translation is a kind of human behavior with a distinct purpose. It stresses target-orientation of translation and focuses on the translation situation which determines which methods to be adopted, and guides the translator to write versions based on the purpose, so that the expected function of the translation can be better presented. The main content of Skopos theory is the three rules, including the Skopos rule, the coherence rule and the fidelity rule. This thesis focuses on the errors in English version of Chinese tea’s names and the application of the three rules of Skopos theory in the translation of the tea’s names. The author selects representative tea’s names examples, using comparative analysis and documentary analysis to find effective approaches deeply, such as literal translation, transliteration and free translation from the perspective of the three rules of Skopos theory.

Keywords

Skopos theory; Chinese tea’s name; Translation.

1. Introduction

1.1. Background of the Thesis

With a long history and improvement of Chinese tea’s culture, most Chinese tea’s names with deep meaning are influenced by its distinct materials, making progress and the usual customs. Such tea’s names like Black tea, Longjing Tea, Dahongpao are not just widely accepted by Chinese people, but also spread in many other countries. However, for many reasons, the translation of Chinese tea’s names makes translators and interpreters hard to translate in English correctly.

German functional translation was first originated in 1970s. It was Katharina Reiss who first proposed and used its concept as the basis. (Fu, 2010) She connected language function, text type and translation strategy to shape the prototype of functional ideological theory. On the basis of Hans Josef Vermeer, the famous German translation theorist, first created Skopos theory. There are three rules in Skopos theory. (ibid, 2010)

The “Skopos rule” is the core value of the Skopos theory, meaning that translation should be generated in the way expected by the receivers in the context of target language and its culture. The “coherence rule” refers to the translation should conform to the expression habits of the target language and can be understood in the communicative environment of the target language. And the “fidelity rule” requires that the translated text and the original text should
maintain inter-lingual coherence and maximize the semantic meaning of the original text. (Nord, 2001)

To further develop the translation of Chinese tea’s names, studies on translation of Chinese tea’s names should be carried out from the perspective of the Skopos theory. Varieties of translation examples are used to analyze under the guidance of the Skopos theory in this thesis.

1.2. Purpose and Significance of the Study

On account of many examples of translation of tea’s names, the study adopts three rules from the Skopos theory in analyzing and applying Chinese tea’s names translation. This thesis is aimed to attract extensive attention for the mistranslated Chinese tea’s names. More significantly, the purpose of this thesis is also to summarize the errors and to find helpful strategies arose in the translation process, and it will provide effective references for interpreters and translators.

Considering the problems of Chinese tea’s names translation, this thesis is attempted to help translators know more about Chinese tea’s culture deeply and to master useful translation strategies under the guidance of three rules from Skopos theory. Those who love translating will further understand it as well. The thesis also hopes the appropriate English version of tea’s names can be applied in most tea companies. In a word, the study intends to not only avoid misunderstanding from two different cultural background but also facilitates Chinese tea culture contacts all over the world.

1.3. Structure of the Thesis

This thesis is divided into five parts. The introduction is mainly about the background, purpose and significance, the layout of the thesis. Chapter two gives an overview of the theoretical foundation for Skopos theory, including its definition and three rules: the Skopos rule, the coherence rule and the fidelity rule. And in chapter three, based on some translation examples, three typical errors in English version of Chinese Tea’s names are illustrated. The first mistake is neglecting the essence of Tea’s name, the second is having the same name with objects. The last error is varying of technical terms for one name. What’s more, applications of Chinese Tea’s names from the perspective of Skopos theory are described in chapter four. This part involves analysis and translation strategies like free translation, literal translation, and transliteration. Lastly, conclusion and limitations can be found in chapter five.

2. Theoretical Foundation

2.1. Definition of Skopos Theory

Functionalist theory came from 1970s, and it has developed for four stages. The “Translation Criticism” (Hui, 2019) was first put forward by Kantharina Reiss, which was also called the prototyping stage. Reiss thought that one should attaches importance to the purpose when translating. The second stage is Skopos theory, which is proposed by Hans J. Vermeer. And then the action theory of the Finnish-German translation scholar Justa Holz-Manttari follows it. The last stage is Christiane Nord’s translation-oriented text analysis and the function plus loyalty. (2019) The idea of “the word or phrase in the text as a unit of translation” came out by Kantharina Reiss in 1971. Therefore, the basic pattern of the Skopos theory had been established. Skopos theory pays attention to the equivalence-based theories, focusing on the original text. And the characteristics of the original text must be presented in the target language. But translators think if they base their ideas on this theory, they will focus more on the equivalence to word by word. Consequently, some translators point out that this theory is far away from the translation practice. What’s more, this theory still had its disadvantages. In the first place, the structure of text classification should be corrected. Moreover, the research mainly based on text theory, which didn’t pay more attention to other features. Although Reiss’s
theory followed the rule of functionalist theory, it didn’t totally get rid of the equivalence-based theory. So new theories called for. Hans Vermeer broke through the drawback of the equivalence-based theory, he then produced a core value in functionalist theory called Skopos theory in 1978. Vermeer believed that the desire effect of translation can influence the strategies of translation. Translation is not just the transition between different languages, but also the activities of cross-cultural communication. It is also considered an inferential process, which mainly focused on translation order, target text receivers, target cultural context, and the distinct creative features of translated text. The Skopos theory has proven that how to choose the strategies of translation depends on the specific translated purpose. Li & Lu (2020) said that according to the theory, a purposeful act of translation must follow three basic rules: the rule of purpose, the rule of coherence and the rule of fidelity.

2.2. Skopos Rule

“Skopos” was originated in Greek, meaning “target”, “function” or “purpose”. The translation purpose determines the whole translating process. In other words, the translation methods are dependent on the translated texts to be obtained. So, the core value of the Skopos theory is Skopos rule. It is tailored for readers and plays an important role in culture and context of the target language. Vermeer holds that translators should observe the Skopos rule, for the translated behaviors are based on its purpose. That is to say, translations can be not equivalent to the original if it has been achieved the desired outcome. However, translators must comply with the Skopos rule conscientiously.

2.3. Coherence Rule

The rule of coherence requires that the version should conform to the original, to the intercultural communication, accepted by the reader. It mainly consists of two parts, the coherence of language and the coherence of logic.

There are many differences between English and Chinese, such as ways of writing, grammatical rules, applications of custom, etc. Compare with Chinese, passive sentences and main clause are widely used in English. Therefore, translators should translate texts based on the rules, avoiding writing “Chinglish”. On the one hand, transforming parts of speech is a good way to express meanings accurately. Nouns, verbs and adjectives can be converted. On the other hand, subject, predicate and attributive can also be adjusted in the article.

Coherence rule refers to the fact that the target text must satisfy intralingual coherence, that is, the target text is readable and acceptable, which enables the receiver to understand the target culture and the communicative context in which the target text is used. Li & Lu (2020)

2.4. Fidelity Rule

It is also known as the “faithfulness rule”. It means that there should be interlingual coherence between the original text and the translation, which is equivalent to the so-called faithfulness to the original in other translation theories. It doesn’t mean that the translated version should totally correspond with the original text in vocabulary and the structure of sentences. But Liu and Lu (ibid, 2020) believed that the degree and form of faithfulness to the original depends on the purpose of translation and the understanding of the original by the translator, so as not to miss the translation of the good original.

These three rules are inextricably linked. Among them, the Skopos rule is the most significant and the fidelity rule and the coherence rule are subordinate to the Skopos rule. (Yuan & Ma, 2020)
3. Errors in English Version of Chinese Tea’s Names

3.1. Neglecting the Essence of Tea’s Name

Name is a key point for people to master the essential information. Tea’s name helps us not only distinguish it from others but to embody its implications which includes Chinese tea’s culture. However, some translators find it hard to translate in English, because of their different language and cultural background. For example, “功夫茶”. There is no equivalent word in English, so “Kongfu tea” appears. Whereas there is also another tea name called “工夫茶”(congou tea) in China, which sound and shape are similar, but in totally different meaning. “工夫”indicates time and effort, while“功夫”hints skill, ability or martial art. “工夫茶”is a kind of well-made black tea. “功夫茶”is a professional way of brewing and drinking tea. Namely, it is a Kongfu tea ceremony. That is to say, there should be some differences between them. Studies have shown that both wuyi Rock tea and black tea were parts of the congou tea. Then wuyi Rock tea was deleted the word "congou", and the "congou" all refers to black tea. Moreover, though the pronunciation of "congfu tea"and “Kongfu”tea are the same in Chinese, translators ought to pay attention to their essences. Otherwise, foreigners may misunderstand it, which may be not good for the spread of Chinese tea culture around the world.

“玉露”, a kind of steamed green tea preserved in China for a long time, indicates tea’s infusion color rather than nectar sup. Its outer shape of the tea is tight and smooth, and its infusion color is green like a jade because of its delicate raw materials and complex process, so it named “玉露”. Owing to its distinct infusion color, it can be translated into Jade-green tea. There is also a type of famous tea “玉露”(Gyokuro) in Japan. It can be defined as a type shaded green tea, which illustrates its infusion color is achieved by deliberately blocking out the sun to increase chlorophyll during planting. Hence, these two kind of “玉露”are definitely not the same things. If Jade-green tea is translated into Chinese gyokuro, then foreigners will think that the two types of tea are only produced in different countries, and cannot know their essential meaning. The lack of translator’s culture was bound to cause cross-cultural barriers for foreigners and misunderstanding of Chinese tea culture.

Moreover, “花茶”, a type of processed tea, represents that it is made up of scented flowers and some kinds of tea in terms of its peculiar smell accepted, including 茉莉花茶, 玫瑰花茶, and 菊花茶. Among them are medical plants, so their roots, stems, leaves, flowers or skins are boiled or brewed, which does not actually contain “tea” but is drunk similar to tea. When it comes to the translation of “花茶”, “Scented tea” is more appropriate than “Flower tea” because there are not flowers in it. Above all, it is feasible to translate “茉莉花茶”and“玫瑰花茶” to “Jasmine scented tea”, “Rose tea” respectively. Translators need to scrutinize homophone and homograph on tea’s name, to enhance their abilities to understand the implications of each tea’s name.

3.2. Having the Same Name with Objects

Numerous tea’s names have the same terms with objects in China, which is easy to cause wrong associations and lead to mistranslated versions. For instance, “水仙茶”, it is often mistaken for “水仙花“which is just like Jasmine scented tea leaves. Therefore, “Narcissus tea” was used in some tea companies. However, “水仙茶”was first discovered during the Song Dynasty. The story goes that it was found in a cave by Tai Lake. The cave was called “祝仙”, which means “prayers to the gods.” “祝仙” is similar in pronunciation to“水仙”for those who speak in dialect, so it became the name of the newly discovered tea bush. Moreover, “水仙”is a place in which “水仙茶”has originated in Fujian Province. Residents cut branches and grow seedlings to make
the best tea. Nowadays as a kind of oolong tea, “水仙茶” is widely popular in China. For the above reasons, transliteration “Shuixian tea” would be appropriate.

“六安瓜片” originates from Anhui Province of China. It is featured in almost all lists of “China’s Famous Teas” and is mentioned extensively throughout long Chinese tea history. The name “六安瓜片” should be translated as “Lu’an melon seed” or “Lu’an melon seed shaped tea” rather than “Lu’an guapian tea”, thus referring to the origin of this fine tea: the city of Lu’an in Anhui Province. The “Melon Seed” part of the name comes from the fact that the processed tea leaves resemble a melon seed shape when brewed and fully flat and it has large and very neat green leaves with an emerald tint in appearance.

What’s more, “白牡丹”, produced in Nanping, Fujian Province, is a kind of White tea in China. Its features are strong, with fresh and gray-green leaves. While its central leaves are silvery, forming a “heart-shaped” with white lousiness in infused leaves. The tea buds is bright with green color, straight and covered with white down. Its taste is brisk, sweet and mellow and brings clean aroma to people. After brewing, the tea leaves are very thick, bright and soft, including strong flavor and fresh fragrance which appreciates residents. However, “白牡丹” also demonstrates that a types of flower are covered with white petals. It is for the unique color and fresh fragrance that people name it “白牡丹茶”. Here are two different English versions of “白牡丹茶”, “White peony tea” and “Baimudan tea”. The transliteration (“Baimudan tea”) is better than the former, for the object white peony has nothing to do with “白牡丹茶”. Hence, the translation of “Baimudan tea” can be easily recognized by foreigners.

Generally speaking, translation is not only a mechanical transformation of two languages, but also the communication between different cultures. Chinese translators should search for more information and have a great understanding of technical terms of tea’s names, using different tactics to translate them.

3.3. Varies of Technical Terms for One Name

“东方美人”(Oriental Beauty) is one of the most famous oolong tea in Taiwan. The history of this tea is remarkable in that it came about quite by accident. In the early 19th century, the oolong tea in Taiwan was favored by the British royal family. Once upon a time, a merchant presented it to the queen of England who was amazed by its unique aroma. She appreciated its lovely and bright appearance, just like a beautiful and elegant woman, thus named for it “Oriental Beauty tea”, which has symbolized the good quality of the tea. “Oriental Beauty” has many English names as well. A rare extraordinary tea, is also famous for Imperial Formosa Oolong, Champagne Oolong, and White Tip Oolong. (“白毫” is the traditional Taiwan name called “white-tipped”). However, for those who do not know the background information for the Oriental Beauty, they can’t distinguish White Tip Oolong and Oriental Beauty.

Furthermore, “大红袍” is also one of the most renown and exclusive teas in the world. Many versions like “Big Red Robe” and “Dahongpao” appears. It is designated both a “The Four Great Bushes” tea and a “Chinese Famous Tea”. It is a long leaf oolong tea with a sweet aroma, a unique woody character and fruity muscatel tones. It has a distinct taste, but no bitterness at all. To translate it into correct version for target readers, translators should know the reason why it is called “大红袍”. According to the legend, the mother of an emperor from the Ming Dynasty once fell sick and was cured by the tea from four bushes growing on Wuyi rock. To show his sincere gratitude, the emperor sent red robes which meant the emperor’s power in ancient China, to Wuyi to cover those four bushes. And those 4 bushes still exist today. Red color is usually associated with celebrations and joyful occasions. Whereas it hints danger, anger and violence in English, so the literal version “Big Red Robe” doesn’t obey the fidelity rule in Skopos theory, which it’s confusing and disgusting for foreigners. Hence, another transliteration “Da hong pao” may be much more suitable and readable for readers.
To conclude, translators should not merely put emphasis on the adjunct of tea and select the appropriated words in English based on different cultural background but to avoid applying various terms in the same tea’s name.

4. Applications of Chinese Tea’s Names from the Perspective of Skopos Theory

4.1. Application of Skopos Rule

Skopos rule, as the core theory of Skopos theory, lays emphasis on translation which is considered as an activity with an aim or purpose at the target readers. It emphasizes the communicative purpose of the translation, which requires translators to have a clear understanding of the communicative function of the spread of Chinese tea culture. From the perspective of the theory, language adequacy is more important than equivalence. In order to achieve it, it is necessary for interpreters to consider the aim of Chinese tea’s names translation, to live up to foreign customers’ expectations and to balance the target text and the original text.

Take “Black tea” for example, it is produced from a small village in Fujian Province. Wuyi tea was the first kind of Black tea which entered the British market. John Ovington believed that this tea was “Bohea” (武夷茶), it was named “Vocui” in China. Only when people felt sick and wanted to be healthy can they drink it. (Liu, 2016) It was called “Black tea” in British, for its leaves were small, and the reddish-brown after brewing. With the tea culture development of India and Sri Lanka, the import of Chinese Black tea declined. However, Black tea became a conventional terms for “红茶”. Most translators translate “黑茶” into “Dark tea” or “Fermented tea” in order to classify them correctly. This method obeys the Skopos rule which not only aims to show the characteristic of tea but also live up to foreigners’ habits of communication and increase the development of tea trade.

“武夷岩茶”, also called “Wuyi Yan tea” or “Wuyi Rock tea”. It grows between the rocks of Wuyi mountains, which embodies strong willpower, abundant vitality and natural pollution-free feature, conveying the strong power to meet shadowy future. Customers love tea due to its healthy, antivirus function. “Rock” stands for uplifting, strong and brave, catering to the youth who often sit up late. Besides, the wisdom of rock solid encourages them to overcome difficulties which meets people needs. Using literal translation to translate “武夷岩茶” into “Wuyi Rock tea” is suitable because there is no misunderstandings and ambiguity.

4.2. Application of Coherence Rule

The coherence rule indicates that the translation must meet the standard of intra-textual coherence. In conclusion, Jiao Yang (2016) thinks that translated text can be accepted and read by readers. It should be understood easily and have significance in communicative situation of target language culture. The coherence rule also means the choice of translation strategies.

For one thing, some connotative meanings are inside tea names. “Wen Jun Green Tea” (文君绿茶) is a good example. This English version applied the literal translation strategy, which conveys only the literal meaning to the foreigners. For most Chinese, they know the connotation of “文君” who was an elegant and accomplished woman in the ancient Han Dynasty. Nowadays, when one drinks it, that means he is a gentleman with dignity. Thus, translators should add notes for this name: Wen Jun is a talented and elegant female in the history of China. And the tea has become a symbol of intellectuals. The notes will be understood and accepted by the target language readers.

In addition, “泾阳茯砖茶” (Jingyang Brick tea), is a kind of tea processed by Aspergillus. It named “茯茶”, for it is made from “Moderate Heat” to “End of Heat” (Zhang & Tian, 2019) (around July 6th to July 23th in every year) when it is the hottest and humid days of the year.
This kind of tea, with a little bit bitter, is detoxified in nature and effective in regulating digestion, lowering cholesterol, which can help people dissolve the poison. (Guo, 2015) It belongs to dark tea, so one of the versions is “jingyang Dark tea”. To some extent, these explained words should be added so that it conforms to the coherence rule and the target readers can get to know the core value and meaning more easily.

For another, translators should highlight texts with introduction of tea culture and its benefits to break the cognitive barriers for the target readers and to increase the spread of Chinese tea culture around the world. For instance, to introduce “忆江南菊花茶”, some ingredients can be shown in manual. “The Yijiangnan chrysanthemum tea selects quality of Hangzhou white chrysanthemum with fruit raw materials. And this product is easy to carry, which is preferred solid drink for four seasons. What’s more, the infusion color exhibits yellow-bright. When tasting, it leaves a pleasant and long-lasting after taste.”

To illustrate “六堡茶”, some methods for appreciating tea can be written in instruction manual: “The appreciation of ‘Liubao tea’ is mainly from five aspects: shape, infusion color, aroma, flavor, and infused leaf. (Feng, 2019) Infusing: use dark-red enameled pottery and covered bowl, brewing with boiled hot water.” “infusion color” refers to “汤色”, “appreciation” stands for “品尝” and “鉴赏”, “infused leaf” means “叶底”, the tea leaves after steeping and brewing. Due to these explanations, some technical terms will be easy to understand for the target readers. These comments can help foreigners master the basic information of Chinese tea, enhancing the receivers to understand and accept the target culture.

When it comes to the shape of tea, translators should also give a brief introduction. Take the “Baimao tea” for instance, “白毛茶, 树之大者高二丈、小者七八尺, 嫩叶如龙眼树叶而薄。” Feng Jiajia believed that it can be translated into “Baimao tea, the trees could be two zhangs or just from seven to eight chis tall (zhang: unit of length, about 10.9 feet; chi: unit of length, about 1.09 feet), with their young leaves as thin as longan leaves.” (2019)

“丈” and “尺” are compared with feet, which is vivid and not difficult for readers to get it under the guidance of the coherence rule. Hence, translators need to obey the coherence rule, developing target readers’ interest in drinking Chinese tea.

4.3. Application of Fidelity Rule

The fidelity rule requires that the translated text and the original text should maintain interlingual coherence and maximize the semantic meaning of the original text. Besides, it is feasible to leave out the unimportant messages.

Actually, the Skopos rule is the basic rule of the theory, and the coherence rule and fidelity rule are put forward to achieve this aim, so that the target receivers can accept the translation and be faithful to the original text. (Gu, 2020) Therefore, transliteration and free translation should be applied in practice, so that the target language culture will be considered, and the translation is faithful and readable.

Wu and Zou(2017) reckon that “龙井茶”, one of the famous tea in China, is a type of green tea produced in Longjing Village, Zhejiang Province. It is said that this type of tea was found in mountains around Longjing village where the water there didn't dry up. Residents believed that there should be a god helps them. Moreover, “龙” implied a sign of dignity, power and happiness in China, while in Western culture, it means evil or cruelty. The meanings are totally different between the East and the West. Therefore, it is not proper to render into “Dragon Well tea”, foreigners will confuse and cannot accept this product due to the cultural differences, so the transliteration should be used, and it is translated into “Longjing tea” instead.

“铁观音”, is also named “Iron Buddhha” or “Tieguanyin Tea”. It is acknowledged that a tea farmer sacrificed a cup of tea to Guanyin (an Asian spiritual figure of mercy) every day to praise for having a better life. Once upon a time, he found a tea tree when climbing. The tea leaves
were shining. He then picked tea leaves and made them to Oolong tea. It is stated that "铁" did not describe “Guanyin”. Instead, it should be included two features. For one thing, it hints the dark infusion color which resembles iron color. For another, it is much heavier than the other tea, so it is called “重如铁”. However, it is not appropriate to render as “Iron Buddha”, for the target readers will not know the essence of tea. If it is translated into "Tea Buddha", then the version remains the original text and inherits the unique tea culture to the foreigners. This free translation can highlight its features, which is easy for receivers to recognize it. Furthermore, transliteration “Tieguanyin Tea” can be applied as well. This approach achieves the purpose of the target text and obeys the fidelity rule which is faithful and meaningful. Additionally, “生茶” and “熟茶” are not "ripe" tea and “raw” tea respectively. Because “生茶” refers to Pu’er tea which is fermented naturally, while “熟茶” means that it is fermented by men. “杀青” is translated into “dewater” instead of “kill greenness”, for it means drains the water from tea leaves.

Since many English and Chinese expressions are similar but quite different in meaning, translators should apprehend the exact meaning of Chinese tea's name by applying different translation strategies under the guidance of the fidelity rule, which is equivalent to the so-called faithfulness to the original text.

5. Conclusion

Skopos theory is to produce a text at target setting for a target purpose and target addressee in target circumstances. It was proposed by Hans Vermeer, who inherits the research results of Katharina Reiss and puts forward three rules of Skopos theory: Skopos rule, coherence rule and fidelity rule. (Gu, 2020) The “Skopos rule” exists throughout the translation and it is the core value in Skopos theory, while the “coherence rule” and the “fidelity rule” are subordinate to it. The introduction including background, purpose and the structure of this thesis are shown. This study is aimed to discuss some mistakes for English version of Chinese tea's names by applying representative examples and to analyze the applications under the guidance of three rules of Skopos theory. This thesis hopes to attach translators attention in translating technical terms for tea's names and to find specific strategies for translation. The author researches three translated errors by applying case analysis and documentary analysis, which indicates that translators should understand the essence and historical information of technical tea's names, laying emphasis on the cultural differences before translating. Based on the three rules of Skopos theory, translators need to analyze the specific situation and combine the target text to make the English version more consistent with the original text, which lives up to target reader's needs.

It is no denying that there are still some shortcomings and limitations in this study. On the one hand, due to the time and space, only insufficient unique examples are to be discussed. Take the third part of Chapter 3 for instance, only “Oriental Beauty” and “Dahongpao” are chosen to explain, which are inadequate to demonstrate the errors. On the other hand, the author has defects in technical terms and vocabulary that needs continuous accumulation.

All in all, translation is a communicative and practical activity. This thesis tries to offer some useful strategies for most translators, encouraging them to have a better understanding of the background information of Chinese tea’s names, and improving their abilities to translate original text into target text more faithfully and acceptably based on the guidance of the Skopos theory.

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