



A Study on Translation of Network Catchwords Guided by Skopos Theory

Zheng Hui¹, Wang Mengyu^{1*}(Corresponding Author)

Inner Mongolia University, Hohhot, China.

Correspondence: zhenghui8426@163.com, my15530855617@163.com

Abstract: With the development of the Internet, Network catchwords have become an important carrier for cross-cultural communication. However, their English translations often suffer from inaccuracy and do not conform to English expression habits. Guided by the Skopos Theory and adhering to the principles of "fidelity" and "eliminating cultural differences", this study proposes four specific translation methods for Network Catchwords: literal translation, literal translation with annotations, free translation, and transliteration. These methods are based on the three major characteristics: , that is , creativity, simplicity, and temporal spirit. The study validates these methods through recent popular cases such as "power of silver hair", "lying flat", "carry the can", and "Moutai".

The research results show that choosing appropriate translation methods based on the characteristics of Network catchwords can effectively solve the translation pain points, accurately convey the meaning, and adapt to the cultural connotations. This study not only provides a practical path and abundant cases for the English translation of Network catchwords, filling the gap in theoretical research and standardized practice in this field, but also helps Chinese social culture reach the world through precise language conversion, enhancing the international dissemination and influence of Chinese culture.

Keywords: Network catchwords, Skopos Theory, translation studies

Introduction

Nowadays, China is in the Internet and information age, the spread of Network catchwords has become a bridge between Chinese and Western cultures. Shuttleworth and Cowie[1]once said that translation is a process which occurs between cultures rather than simply between languages. Therefore, under the guidance of Skopos Theory, when translating Network catchwords, we should focus on the function and social culture in translation.

The purpose of this paper is to provide the target language readers with the most suitable translation for their understanding, and to use the Skopos Theory as a theoretical support to guide the translation of Network catchwords, so that groups with different linguistic and cultural backgrounds can have a better understanding of each other's way of thinking, sense of humor, and mode of social interaction, thus promoting information sharing and cultural exchange on a global scale.

Current research is mostly confined to specific years or single types of Network catchwords, without establishing a continuous tracking and systematic analysis of the popular buzzwords in recent years. Moreover, few studies combine specific cases of mistranslation, making it difficult to meet the demand for accurately conveying Chinese social culture in cross-cultural communication.

This paper is of great significance to further translation research. On the one hand, this paper studies the English translation strategies of Network catchwords, which provides a variety of cases as well as a new perspective for English translation of Network catchwords; on the other hand, this paper focuses on cross-cultural communication, just like Eugene A. Nida[2] emphasizes, "the essence of translation is communication".

II Literature Review

2.1 Current Research of Skopos Theory at Home and Abroad

In the West, the Skopos Theory was first proposed by German scholar Hans J. Vermeer and further developed by Christiane Nord and Jürgen von Hoppe. The research of foreign scholars on the Skopos Theory covers a number of schools and viewpoints, forming a relatively perfect theoretical system. The main schools of research on Skopos Theory in foreign countries include the German functionalist school, the North American functionalist school and so on. On the basis of Skopos Theory, these schools put forward different views and theoretical models by combining their respective cultural backgrounds and translation practices. In recent years, foreign research on Skopos Theory has shown some new progress and trends. On the one hand, with the rise of interdisciplinary research, more and more scholars have begun to combine the Skopos Theory with other disciplines to explore new paths of translation research. On the other hand, some scholars have also begun to pay attention to the application and development trend of Skopos Theory in the new technological environment, such as the impact and challenge of the application of machine translation, artificial intelligence and other technologies on Skopos Theory.

Skopos Theory was introduced late in China, but with the internationalization of translation studies and the improvement of the

[Received 12, August, 2025; Accepted 15, October, 2025; Published (online) 20, October, 2025]



Attribution 4.0 International (CC BY 4.0)

1

1*

academic level of Chinese translation, it has gradually attracted the attention of domestic scholars. From the 1990s onwards, with the works of Hans J. Vermeer and other scholars being translated into Chinese, Skopos Theory began to arouse extensive discussions in the field of translation studies in China. In the early studies in China, scholars mainly focused on the basic theoretical framework and core concepts of Skopos Theory as well as its impact on the translation process. In China, with the rapid development of the translation industry, the Skopos Theory has gradually penetrated into the translation practice, and it is especially obvious in the fields of cultural translation, including movie and television translation, advertisement translation, news translation, business and legal translation, and so on. Chinese scholars have focused more on the localized application of Skopos Theory in addition to the analysis and discussion of the basic theory in Skopos Theory research. On the one hand, Chinese scholars have put forward the translation strategy of “Dynamic Adaptation” and studied how to apply the Skopos Theory in cross-cultural translation to better meet the needs of the target culture. On the other hand, in the context of globalization, scholars have discussed the role of the Skopos Theory in cultural communication, especially how to use it to carry out effective cultural communication under the framework of international cooperation, such as “One Belt, One Road”.

2.2 Current Research of Network Catchwords at Home and Abroad

Since the Internet originated in the United States, the United States was the first to start researching Internet language and Network catchwords. In 1997, the Research and Documentation Center for World Language Issues at the University of Hartford hosted a symposium on the Internet and language, which invited some well-known linguists to discuss the English as a common language on the Internet on September 18-20, 2003, the First International Conference on Language Studies on the Internet was held in Spain, which was a truly international symposium on the Internet and language. These two conferences marked the beginning of online language research, attracting the attention of the world's linguistic community. David Crystal, a famous linguist, published his latest book *Language and the Internet* in 2001, and became a leading figure in the study of Internet language in English. The BBC produced a documentary called *Tuhao, let's be friends!* (《土豪与我们》), in which the word “tuhao” (土豪) was discussed in depth, showing the interest and attention of Network catchwords.

In China, Network catchwords have had a far-reaching impact on language life. Recently, scholars such as Qiu Man, Sun Yiqian and Liu Juan have started with the characteristics of current Network catchwords, and with the help of translation memetics, they briefly categorized Chinese Network catchwords from a cross-cultural perspective, and analyzed the translation of Network catchwords popular in the year they belong to by applying translation strategies such as literal translation, free translation, alternative translation and annotation. However, although many scholars have begun to pay attention to the impact of the translation of Network catchwords on cultural communication and dissemination in recent years, there is still a relative lack of translation research in this area, and there is a limited amount of English translation materials related to Network catchwords. There are only two bilingual specialized dictionaries published in China at present, and other bilingual comprehensive dictionaries tend to cross-collect the English translations of some of the Network catchwords. Moreover, the unification and standardization of English translation of Network catchwords have not been paid attention to by authoritative departments and institutions. So far, there is no monograph published on the English translation of Network catchwords, and its theoretical research by relevant academic institutions is not deep enough.

III Main Characteristic of Network Catchwords

3.1 Creativity

Bassnett^[3] argued that the inheritance and creation of traditional languages has played an integral role in the development of other languages. One of the most obvious features of Network catchwords is its innovation. As a tool for communication, the Internet pursues individuality and creativity, providing space for Internet users to give full play to their imagination and creativity. Due to the lack of effective monitoring, Internet users can maximize their imagination. This reflects the innovation of people's attitude towards life. In the year 2024, people are getting into “Abstract”, “Abstract chat”, “Abstract Goblin Mode in literature” and “Abstract boastful copywriting”. They roam all social media platforms. Such as “Because he is good”, the beginning of the popular phrase from a commentary by Guo Degang, which said that Zhang Tianshi does not eat four foods, the first does not eat beef, because he is good. Through the netizens' independent innovation and process, this is an answer that will handle most questions. When you can not answer some meaningless questions, you can use “Because he is good”.

3.2 Simplicity

Mr. Yu Genyuan^[4], in his book *An Introduction to Internet Language*, believes “online language is characterized by short sentences, direct expression, fewer large descriptions, and fewer meaningful and cryptic expressions, presenting the characteristics of the initial spoken language”.

For example, the very popular “TGIF”, that is “Thank God It's Friday”; “TBH”, that is “To Be Honest”, and other acronyms can express the user's emotions and feelings in a concise and clear way. Another example is the early Network catchword “nbcs”, that is, “nobody cares”. This simplicity not only accelerates the speed of information dissemination, but also conforms to the fast-paced lifestyle of modern people, which is one of the important reasons for the wide spread of Network catchwords.

3.3 Temporal Spirit

In the era of information explosion, like other popular things, most of the Network catchwords are often used in this special era, with the characteristics of keen and timely reflection of social hotspots. Liu Juan^[5] said “as a product of a specific period, it reflects the true portrayal of psychology and social development”. But with the passage of time, they may also be replaced by emerging buzzwords or gradually fade out of people's view. For example, the term “strawberry people” first appeared in the 2000s to refer to young people who are fragile and vulnerable, similar to strawberries, which are shiny on the outside but break down when touched. The popularity of this term reflects the social pressure and emotional vulnerability faced by young people at that time. The term was particularly applicable to the social changes and generational differences of that era, especially to the

young people who faced intense work and life pressures. With the passage of time, the term has gradually been replaced by a new generation of buzzwords, such as “brittle college students”.

IV Problems in Translation of Network Catchwords

4.1 Lack of Accuracy

According to Taibi and Ozolins^[6], the complexity of the translation process and lack of sufficient quality assurance procedures can result in sub-optimal translation products, that is translations with disfluencies and errors, the meanings of many words or phrases are not only difficult to find directly corresponding translations in different languages, but also the meanings of certain words may change with the passage of time. Therefore, lack of accuracy is a common problem when translating Network catchwords. Many Network catchwords have multiple meanings, and it is often difficult to capture all of their potential meanings when translating them. For example, some Chinese Network catchwords use phonetic translations of foreign words, such as “LOL” (大笑), which is directly borrowed from English. However, if its phonetic translation is not familiar to the target language audience, then “LOL” alone lacks accuracy and may require additional explanation or localized translation.

4.2 Inconformity of English Habit

As each language has its unique expression and cultural background, when translating Network catchwords, it is true that there are inconsistencies between English and Chinese idioms. According to Zhou Mi^[7], Network catchwords are a kind of new attribute of cultural development, and only those with the same cultural foundation can better understand the cultural connotation of Network catchwords.

Prčić^[8] found that English is the only language thus far that has become a part of many native languages and cultures around the world, to the diminution of some of its foreign language properties. Therefore, the translator should pay attention to the fact that the translation should be in line with the habits and culture of the English language, so as to avoid that the readers cannot understand or misunderstand the translated content due to cultural differences. And the translator needs to be faithful to the meaning of the original text, but also take into account the way of expression of the target language, so as to make it sound natural and authentic. Some Network catchwords can be directly translated, but in many cases, literal translation may lead to hard or incomprehensible expressions, which is not in line with the English language habits. For example, “打 call” can be translated as “cheer” or “show support” instead of directly translating it as “hit call”. Expressions such as “hit call” are not in line with the English language habits at all and will mislead foreign readers.

V Methodology

5.1 Literal Translation

The literal translation emphasizes faithfulness to the original language in the process of translation. The advantage of it can maximize the retention of the characteristics of the source language, let the target language readers feel the unique charm and expression of the source language, effectively avoid some ambiguities and misunderstandings in the process of translation, so as to achieve the unity of the “form” and “meaning”. In order to facilitate the readers to understand the target language more easily and avoid the cultural gap, literal translation is adopted for the contents that can be understood by both Chinese and English cultures. The following are two examples of using the literal translation method to translate Network catchwords:

E.g.1: “银发力量” refers to the unignorable power generated by the elderly group in all areas of society, age can not stop the “silver hair people” vitality. The term “银发” refers to the elderly, however, we don't need to translate it as “old people” when translating, because in any country, the word “银发” has a very clear meaning and there is no need to add more to it, and the original meaning can be retained to make the readers understand the meaning of the word, so the author translates it as “power of silver hair”, which is clear and concise.

E.g.2: “躺平” is one of the popular Network catchwords in recent years, and the term “躺平” has been given a new meaning. The term originated from an article published by a netizen, “Lying down is justice”, in which the author pointed out that lying down is a kind of wise man's movement to fight against the traditional social shackles, which is a new kind of human attitude and a generally accepted way of life. The translator does not need to reflect the words “Lowering Desire” in the translation, but directly translates it as “Lying Flat” to convey the deeper meaning of the word. “Lying Flat” has a vivid image, and readers can associate it with the image of “躺平” when they see the word, so they can realize its new meaning as an Network catchword and achieve the purpose of translation.

Both of the above examples have symbolic meanings, and their connotations can be grasped through their literal meanings. Therefore, in order to accurately convey Chinese culture and enable target language readers to understand the current characteristics of China, the translator chooses literal translation for the translation.

5.2 Literal Translation and Annotation

Literal translation and annotations, referring to annotated translation, is a translation strategy that balances fidelity and comprehensibility. According to House^[9], the writer found that translation between languages is possible, but at the same time the universal translatability is limited by aspects such as changes in the implicit meanings and semantic communicative functions. Therefore, due to the cultural differences between the target language and the source language, the translated text after literal translation may be difficult for readers to understand, and in the absence of a suitable target alternative, the translator needs to add parenthetical comments to supplement the explanation of its connotation. The following are three examples of translating Network catchwords using the literal translation and annotation method:

E.g.3: The term “翻车” translated as “Flip over the car”, literally means that the car flipped over, but in Internet parlance, “翻车” generally refers to something, activity or program has an unexpected failure, or result. Therefore, we can add a note after “Flip over the car”, that is “It describes a situation where the expectations were high but the final outcome was not satisfactory.

E.g.4: “鸡尾酒效应” means when we are talking at a cocktail party or in a noisy place. At the same time, we notice when someone suddenly calls our name from a distance. “The Cocktail Party Effect” refers to a type of auditory selectivity in humans. It can be seen that “Cocktail party effect” has its own profound connotation, if only directly translated as “Cocktail party effect”, without any comment, many readers will have a sense of “I don't know why”. Therefore, the translator needs to annotate the phrase with “Concentrating on one person's conversation while ignoring other dialogues or noises in the background.”

The two examples mentioned above have multiple meanings, and different readers may have different interpretations. Therefore, in order to convey their accurate connotations without causing ambiguity, it is necessary to add annotations for analysis based on the literal translation.

5.3 Free Translation

Nida[10] also said that free translation means that the essence of translation is to convey the implicit meaning to the target readers regardless of the fixed style of the words. Compared with literal translation, free translation focuses more on conveying the overall meaning and context of the original text rather than just the literal meaning of the words. Due to the different ways of thinking and the lack of knowledge, the target readers are unable to translate directly, and the use of annotations is not necessary, so the translator must use free translation to meet the standards of the target culture, the following are three examples of translating Network catchwords using the free translation method.

E.g.5: “背锅” is the short form of “背黑锅”, which is directly translated as “carry a wok on the back”, but we can find that this word is a bit stiff if we use the literal translation method. We compare “背锅” to bearing a fault for another person, which can be translated as “be made a scapegoat”. But through the study of the English language, the translator translates it more appropriately as “carry the can”. “Carry the can” means “take the blame for something, often another's mistakes or misdeeds”. This is originally a British slang. From this, we can see that the Chinese expression “背锅” and the British slang expression “carry the can” have the same meaning. Therefore, the translator may borrow the slang expression and translate “carry the can” as follows, which not only takes into account the cultural differences, but also conveys the hidden meaning to the readers and realizes the translation purpose.

E.g.6: “画饼” refers to the practice of making absurd promises, then using rhetoric to make people believe in them and serve them, and then failing to fulfill the promises in the end. It comes from the idiom of “画饼充饥”, that is “filling one's hunger with empty promises”, which means to comfort oneself with empty promises, especially to deceive others. But for the target language readers, if it is directly translated as “paint a cookie”, it is difficult for them to grasp the connotation of the word, thus failing to achieve the translator's translation purpose. In British and American cuisine, the most common “饼” is a variety of pies with pulp, so the translator translated it as “Pie in the sky”, that is, “上了天的派”, which is used to refer to “plans or promises that are unlikely to be realized”. It can be seen that the free translation of the text takes western culture into consideration, which naturally promotes readers' understanding, thus realizing the purpose of readers' experience of Chinese Network catchwords.

The two examples mentioned above have extremely strong emotional connotations and were created by netizens later. They are completely different from the literal meaning. Therefore, in order to enable the target language readers to have a deeper understanding of Chinese culture, the translator chose to translate them through free translation.

5.4 Transliteration

Transliteration, is a translation strategy to express words in the target language by simulating their pronunciation or finding words with similar pronunciation in the source language. The transliteration generally does not emphasize the meaning of the original word itself, but retains the original phonetic beauty. “It may be true that when translating the original text into the target language, the linguistic form and expression of the original text will undergo some subtle changes, which may seem to be small but have a crucial impact on the quality of translation”, said Mundy[11]. Therefore, when some special words have no direct counterparts in English and cannot be translated accurately, we can consider the transliteration. Here are two examples of Network catchwords translated using the transliteration:

E.g.7: “茅台” is a premium liquor brand in China. In 2023, “茅台” quickly gained popularity among young people by virtue of its co-branded product with Luckin Coffee “Sauce Latte”, making the term “茅台” widely spread on the Internet as a buzzword in that year. For words like “Moutai”, which belongs to Chinese culture and cannot be translated into the target language, translators can directly choose the transliteration, that is, “Moutai”, but it should be noted that the transliteration is not a complete conversion of the original pinyin into English. Under special conditions, the pronunciation and the aesthetics of the translation should be taken into consideration, so “茅台” is not directly transliterated as “Maotai”, but as “Moutai”, so as to achieve the purpose of conveying its deep cultural value while preserving the style and traditional culture of the source language.

E.g.8: “白酒” is a traditional Chinese liquor with a long history of fermentation and distillation. Like “Moutai”, “白酒” is also a word with Chinese characteristics. It also attracts the attention of netizens from all over the world. At first, some people translated “白酒” as “white wine”, a form of translation that did not take into account the cultural differences between China and the West. In the Western definition of “wine”, two conditions must be met: one is that it contains alcohol, and the other is that it is made from grapes. Therefore, “white wine” should be “白葡萄酒”, obviously the translation of “白酒” as “white wine” is incorrect. Then the translator can directly adopt the transliteration when translating “白酒” as “Baijiu”, which not only preserves the cultural characteristics of the source language, spreads the traditional Chinese culture, but also enables the target language readers to fully understand the connotation of “Baijiu”.

The two examples mentioned above are entirely rooted in Chinese traditional culture and possess distinct Chinese characteristics.

When translating, it is necessary to consider respecting the local culture. Therefore, the translator chose to use transliteration to translate them. It preserves the Chinese characteristics while enabling readers to understand Chinese culture.

VI Results and Conclusion

The translation of Network catchwords is a challenging and innovative field of study, especially in today's increasingly globalized and informatized world.

This article firstly analyzes the current situation of Network catchwords and their own characteristics, introduces the problems that may be encountered in the process of translation, and gives concrete examples to illustrate the main forms of these problems. The author recommends four translation methods, namely, literal translation, literal translation and annotation, free translation and transliteration. Translators should choose appropriate translation methods according to their own characteristics, but no matter which methods is chosen, the principles of original fidelity and eliminating cultural differences should be followed. In order to enable readers to understand Network catchwords more directly, the author also lists some examples of the translation of Network catchwords, and further proposes how to modify or get a more appropriate translation by analyzing the mistranslated texts. But this is just a drop in the bucket, if all these buzzwords can be solved like a set of formulas, it will inevitably be biased. Therefore, facing such an era of rapid development of the Internet, the work of Network catchwords should be paid more attention.

REFERENCES

- [1]. Shuttleworth, M. & Moira, C. (2005). *Dictionary of Translation Studies*. Beijing: Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press.
- [2]. Nida, E. A. (2001). *Language, Culture, and Translation*. Shanghai: Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press.
- [3]. Bassnett, S. (1998). *Translation Studies*. London: Routledge.
- [4]. Yu, Y. G. (2001). *An Introduction to Cyber Language*. Beijing: China Economic Publishing House.
- [5]. Liu, J. (2020). *Characteristics and English Translation Strategies of Internet Buzzwords: A Case Study of Internet Buzzwords in 2019*. The Science Education Article Collects, 496(16), 176-177.
- [6]. Taibi, M. & Ozolins, U. (2023). *Quality and integrity in the translation of official documents*. Perspectives, 31(5), 882-899.
- [7]. Zhou, M. (2022). *Thoughts on the English translation of online buzzwords from a cross-cultural perspective*. Overseas English, 478(18), 56-60.
- [8]. Prčić, T. (2014). *Building contact linguistic competence related to English as the nativized foreign language*. System, 42, 143-154.
- [9]. House, J. (2016). *Translation as Communication across Languages and Cultures*, London and New York: Routledge.
- [10]. Nida, E.A. (1993). *Language and Culture: Contexts in Translating*, Shanghai: Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press.
- [11]. Mundy, J. (2007). *Introducing Translation Studies: Theories and Applications*, Beijing: The Commercial Press.