Strategies Adopted by C. H. Brewitt-Taylor for Translating Military Terms in *San Guo Yan Yi* from the Perspective of Skopos Theory

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ABSTRACT

As one of the "Four Great Chinese Classics", *San Guo Yan Yi* (*the Three Kingdoms*) takes an important position in Chinese literature. It contains a lot of military terms like weapons, military attires and military strategies or tactics with unique Chinese cultural elements or connotations which may generate some difficulties or obstacles in translating or understanding, especially for translators who have cultural backgrounds greatly different from what is set in the novel. From the perspective of Skopos Theory, this article aims to conduct a study on the strategies employed by C. H. Brewitt-Taylor for translating such military terms and his preference in the choice of translation strategies in this respect. As the study shows, governed by the Skopos rule, C. H. Brewitt-Taylor's version is somewhat more domesticated so as to make the translated text more natural and smooth, indicating that in translating the military terms, C. H. Brewitt-Taylor tends to follow the coherence rule more than the fidelity rule to enhance the acceptability among the target readers and to achieve the expected skopos.

Keywords: *San Guo Yan Yi, Military terms, Translation strategies, Skopos Theory.*

1. INTRODUCTION

For its important position in Chinese literature, *San Guo Yan Yi* (Three Kingdoms) has been translated or abridged into almost twenty different languages [1], and enjoys high popularity even in countries like the UK and the US.

Up to now, the novel only has three complete English versions: *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, translated by Charles Henry Brewitt-Taylor, a customs officer in the late Qing Dynasty and the early stage of the Republic of China, *Three Kingdoms*, translated by Moss Roberts, a well-known American Sinologist and a respected professor of East Asia Institute at New York University, and *The Three Kingdoms*, translated by Yu Sumei, a professor of the English Department at East China Normal University and the first Chinese who completely translated the Novel.

Many scholars have conducted studies or researches on the English versions from different aspects. Cai Xiaojuan [2] discusses strategies adopted by Moss Roberts for translating Chinese idioms in *San Guo Yan Yi* from functional equivalence perspective, concluding that Moss Roberts tends to adopt literal translation to achieve functional equivalence in order to retain the meaning, form and culture of the original language. Sun Huanjing [3] studies the translation strategies of culture-specific items in Moss Roberts's version from the perspective of cross-cultural communication, hoping that her research can be epitomized as reference for future study. Wang Shirong [4], in one chapter of her dissertation, discusses the translation of "military culture" in *San Guo Yan Yi* from the following aspects: weapons, military inventions and tactics. Wang analyzes those aspects by means of textual criticism, which is to say, her main aim is to correct mistranslations in the existing versions. Chen Tian [5] studies the English translation of some Chinese culture-specific items in the two complete English versions of the Novel translated by Charles H. Brewitt-Taylor and Moss Roberts, and concluded that in translating Chinese culture-specific items in *San*

Guo Yan Yi, Charles H. Brewitt-Taylor's version prefers to choose domestication while Moss Roberts' version tends to adopt foreignization.

Under Skopos Theory, this study explores strategies adopted by Brewitt-Taylor for translating military terms in *San Guo Yan Yi* with a view to offering possibly feasible reference for fulfilling the goal of effective exportation of Chinese culture and translating and teaching practice of Chinese cultural elements or connotations.

2. SKOPOS THEORY AND THREE RULES

The 1970s and 1980s witnessed a shift from the linguistic approaches to the German functionalism and communicative approach to translation studies [6]. As the most significant branch of functionalist approach, Skopos Theory emerged around the 1970s, formulated by Hans J. Vermeer based upon the action theory and communication theory [7]. And it was introduced as a formal term in a monograph called *Groundwork for a General Theory of Translation,* coauthored by Hans J. Vermeer and his teacher Katharina Reiss in 1984 [8]. As the original meaning of "skopos" suggests, scholars who support this idea deem "translating" as an "intentional action'', and the purpose of this action is decisive to the specific strategies adopted in the target text.

Skopos is a Greek word for "purpose". In Vermeer [9]'s view, "every translation can and must be assigned a skopos". This does not mean that the "skopos" is fixed and unified, for any given purpose is only one among many choices. The skopos of translation is defined by specific assignments and adjusted by the translator in his actual practices.

According to Skopos Theory, translators have to abide by several rules in order to create a successful translation product. Those rules include the skopos rule, the coherence rule and the fidelity rule.

The Skopos Rule remains the top rule among the three rules. It helps to end the disputation between literal and liberal translation, for translators are asked to apply appropriate strategies according to the skopos behind every translation assignment. In most cases, translators should take various factors into consideration and use different strategies flexibly, since the actual skopos of a translation task consists of several purposes assigned by different parties. In a given translation

case, the translator has to make choices to ensure the fulfillment of a particular skopos he affirms.

Vermeer [10] considers text as an "offer of information", thus the translated text is an "offer of information" completed through the work of translators in the linguistic environment of the target text according to what has been offered by the source text [11]. In this process, the translator is responsible to create an understandable text for target readers, which leads to another rule in skopos theory: the coherence rule. This rule is also called the standard of "intratextual coherence", with which translators are asked to follow the existing norms in the target culture and the target language. According to this rule, translators should abide by the "culture-specific conventions valid in a particular culture" and the translation should be able to be understood smoothly by the target readers [12]. It helps to emphasize the status of target readers, and sets limitations for rigid word-for-word translation.

As mentioned above, the target text is an offer of information produced by translators based on the source text, and for this reason, the target text should at least be related to the source text in the content level. This relationship, named "intertextual coherence" or "fidelity" is summed up as a new rule: the fidelity rule [11].

Contrary to the coherence rule, this rule helps to control translators' free play. However, the degree of how far this rule should be kept depends on the Skopos Rule. To be more specific, in cases where the target text is produced to achieve the same or similar function as the source text does, it might be appropriate for translators to abide by the fidelity rule. However, if the skopos of the assignment endows the target text with different function, being faithful to the original may be improper.

3. INTRODUCTION TO *SAN GUO YAN YI* THE NOVEL AND ITS ENGLISH VERSIONS

As is mentioned before, San Guo Yan Yi takes such an important position in Chinese literature that it has been adapted in various forms like traditional Chinese performing arts, films, TV series, etc. to mold and shape Chinese ideology as well as the entire Chinese nation in itself.

It is perhaps the featured military culture in this novel that attracts readers at home and abroad. In the 1990s, *San Guo Yan Yi* was entitled, by some western scholars, "a legend of Chinese civil war"

where Chinese people absorb military and diplomatic experience. They believe that great men like Chairman Mao also used this novel for reference. Indeed, the description of wars occupies the vast majority and the cream part of the novel, since the Period of Three-Kingdoms it depicts is mainly made of bloody battles.

San Guo Yan Yi has been translated into nearly twenty different languages, and a large part of its existing versions are English translations. Up to now, as far as the author knows, there are only three complete English versions of this novel, translated respectively by Charles Henry Brewitt-Taylor, by Moss Roberts and by Yu Sumei. There's no doubt that *San Guo Yan Yi* by itself deserves careful and detailed study, considering the significant role it has played in Chinese literature. Its three complete English versions, as the crystallization of translators' painstaking efforts, are also worth studying.

4. STRATEGIES ADOPTED BY BREWITT-TAYLOR FOR TRANSLATING MILITARY TERMS IN *SAN GUO YAN YI* UNDER SKOPOS THEORY

There are a lot of military terms withy unique Chinese cultural elements or connotations in *San Guo Yan Yi*. However, due to their strong link to traditional Chinese culture, such military terms may cause difficulties in translating, particularly for translators whose cultural backgrounds are quite different from what is set in the novel. To facilitate the study, military terms are classified into three groups, namely weapons, military attires, and military strategies, and ST and TT stand for the source text and target text respectively. The author will explore strategies adpoted by Brewitt-Taylor for translating such terms under Skopos Theory in the following.

4.1 Translation Strategies under Skopos Rule

The skopos held by Charles H. Brewitt-Taylor in translating *San Guo Yan Yi* was initially "prepared for the use and education of the Chinese people" [13]. The target readers, who had been enlightened by the May Fourth Movement, stimulated by social changes and the early exploration towards modernization, were eager to learn English. Given the fact that the English level of most Chinese around the 1920s cannot match

that of native speakers, the translator has to reduce the reading difficulty by simplifying the information in the translated text, or he might risk losing readers who are less willing to tackle such a massive novel. In addition, for Chinese readers who have already been well acquainted with the original novel, there's no need for translators to cover all the information in the rendition. For these reasons, Brewitt-Taylor lays more emphasis on the inter-coherence of the translated text, so as to create natural and smooth reading experience for the target readers. Brewitt-Taylor leans towards the coherence rule by transforming the original structure and content to fit the target language and culture. In this case, he usually adopts free translation, omission, amplification, literal translation, literal translation plus partial omission, transliteration, and transliteration plus partial omission to achieve the anticipated skopos. Nevertheless, with the "skopos" set in the first place, being faithful to the original is just one possible way to complete the translational action. As an "expert" in this action, the translator can choose from dozens of translation strategies that may help to realize the established skopos.

4.2 Translation Strategies under Coherence Rule

According to the Coherence Rule, translators should abide by the existing norms in the target culture and language, so as to produce an understandable text for the target readers. In this rule, the status of target readers is highlighted. If the translator attaches greater importance to the receptivity of readers, he or she may lay more emphasis on the Coherence Rule. Since the skopos of Charles H. Brewitt-Taylor is to retell a smooth and easily accepted story in English, the translation strategies he adopts to reflect the Coherence Rule include amplification, omission, literal translation + partial omission, and liberal translation.

4.2.1 Amplification

In translation, amplification happens when the translator tries to present more information than the original text has offered. In the translation, Charles H. Brewitt-Taylor adds modifiers to the original terms to show his personal comprehension. This can be regarded as a method to facilitate the receiving process of target readers, as requested by the coherence rule.

Example 1

ST: 为首大将关云长，提青龙刀，跨赤兔马，截住去路。（第五十回）

TT: ...The leader was Kuan Yu holding the famous Black Dragon sword, bestriding the "Red Hare" steed.

Adjective amplification is a strategy widely used by Charles H. Brewitt-Taylor to translate the weapons and attires of renowned heroes. By adding evaluative adjectives before military terms, he manages to express his personal impressions on them. In Example 1, "famous" is used to highlight the popularity and power of the weapon (Guan Yu's "青龙刀"), so as to pre-bury a favorable impression in readers' mind, which may lead to a high acceptability of the rendition among target receivers. However, this tendency is only restricted to famous characters in the novel.

4.2.2 Omission

In linguistics, omission refers to the leave-out of a word when it appears redundantly in the same sentence. In some cases, military terms will be omitted in the translation when Charles H. Brewitt-Taylor keenly pursues the conciseness to increase the smoothness of his storytelling.

Example 2

ST: 朕想高祖提三尺剑，斩蛇起义，......。（第八十回）

TT: ...the empire won by my Great Ancestor, its founder, when he slew the Snake and restored the Right,...

In Example 2, Brewitt-Taylor wipes up the image of "三尺剑" in his translation. At a price of information and faithfulness loss, the translated text seems to be more compact than the original.

4.2.3 Literal Translation + Partial Omission

Compared with complete omission, partial omission appears more frequently throughout Charles H. Brewitt-Taylor's version. In most cases, partial omission will neither affect the intactness of the original nor raise confusion among target readers, for plenty of background information has been offered in the context. Like "literal translation plus transliteration", this method combines the essence of the coherence rule and the fidelity rule.

Example 3

ST: 关公上赤兔马，手提青龙刀，率领旧日跟随人役，护送车仗，径出北门。(第二十六回)

TT: He rode "Red Hare" and carried Black Dragon in his hand. With a small escort of men, those formally under his commander, he left the city by the north gate.

As Guan Yu's weapon, "青龙刀" has already become a mark in San Guo Yan Yi. It appears so frequently throughout the story so much so that readers can easily recognize it no matter how it's "economically" translated. By partial omission, the translation looks be more concise and thus easily accepted by target readers.

4.2.4 Liberal Translation

Liberal translation, refers to a translation method by which translators are free to change the patterns of meaning manifestation. Compared with literal translation, free translation endows translators with larger freedom, more flexibility and wider space for personalized creation, provided that the meaning and spirit of the original text are successfully delivered in the translation. Charles H. Brewitt-Taylor stay closer to the coherence rule by translating the military terms in a concise and compact way. During the process of collecting samples, the author notices that Charles H. Brewitt-Taylor prefers to use literal translation when a military term appear for the first time.

Example 4

ST: 程普挺铁脊矛出马，与蔡瑁交战。（第七回）

TT: Ch'eng P'u set his supple spear and rode out.

In the translation, the weapon of Cheng Pu is literally translated into "iron-spined snaky lance" in its debut and liberally into "supple spear" upon its second appearance. By doing so, one of its features, flexibility can stand out and be reinforced in readers' mind.

4.3 Translation Strategies Under Fidelity Rule

Under the Fidelity Rule, the target text and the source text should be related to each other in terms of content in order to achieve the "intertextual coherence" or "fidelity" between the two texts. When translators want to perfectly reproduce the

source text, their translation strategies are more likely to reflect the Fidelity Rule.

Strategies adopted by Brewitt-Taylor include literal translation, transliteration, and literal translation plus transliteration.

4.3.1 Literal Translation

Literal translation is widely adopted in Charles H. Brewitt-Taylor's version. When the term cannot find appropriate expressions in English and is too important to be omitted, Charles H. Brewitt-Taylor may resort to literal translation. The linguistic structure of his version is often adjusted according to the norms of the target language, aiming to enable the translated text to be more authentic and natural to the foreign ears.

Example 5

ST: 兀突骨骑象当先，头戴日月**狼须帽**，身披**金珠**缨络，......（第九十回）

TT: King Wufuku on his white elephant was well in the forefront. He had **on a cap with symbols of the sun and moon and streamers of wolfs beard, a fringed garment studded with gems, ...**

In the example above, the word "symbols" is added before "the sun and the moon" to make the image of "日月狼须帽" more lucid; "金珠" is generalized into "gems" to simplify the process of comprehension.

4.3.2 Transliteration

Transliteration refers to the translation method where words are transferred phonically into another language. Brewitt-Taylor mainly uses this method to translate weapon names, which makes the name look more concise in the target text. The receiving process is simplified accordingly, for readers can keep reading without stopping to digest what the name means in English.

Example 6

ST: 云左手持枪隔过画戟，右手拔出青釭宝剑砍去，......（第四十二回）

TT: With his spear in left hand he warded off the halberd strokes and in his right he swung the sword Ch'ing-kung.

In this example, Brewitt-Taylor adopts transliteration for the sword of Zhao Yun, successfully creating an exotic flavor in the

rendition. He combines the method of literal translation, making it easily understood by foreign readers, which reflects the essence of the coherence rule.

4.3.3 Literal Translation + Transliteration

Sometimes transliteration is applied together with literal translation, for simple phonetic transcription makes tiny sense to readers who know little about the original language. Take "泰山" as an instance: "Mount Tai" or "Mount Taishan" makes much more sense to a foreign ear than "Taishan".

Example 7

ST: 左宋谦，右贾华，二将使方天画戟，两边护卫。（第五十二回）

TT: with Sung Ch'ien and Chia Hua, each armed with a ch'I halberd to support him and guard him one on each side.

In the above translation, "戟"is transliterated into "ch'i" followed by its English equivalent "halberd", indicating that this weapon called "ch'i" in Chinese falls into the category of "halberd". Readers can immediately know what kind of weapon it is, without stopping to digest the detailed image of this piece of weapon. Through this method, the translation preference of coherence is reflected.

5. CONCLUSION

According to Skopos Theory, translators can choose to either stay closer to the coherence rule or the fidelity rule, or consider the both at the same time. In most cases, translators should take various factors into consideration and use different strategies in a flexible manner, owing to the fact that the actual skopos of a translation task consists of several purposes assigned by different parties.

As the study shows, Charles H. Brewitt-Taylor's translation n is more domesticated and tends to follow the coherence rule by using strategies like omission or perception-based literal translation for translating military terms. Frequently appearing terms are simplified into generalized terms by means of partial omission, so as to make the translation text more concise in order to make the rendition smooth and natural. With the complicated structure of the original simplified and shortened, readers can jump over the lengthy details. This can help the readers to achieve smooth

reading experience and increase the degree of acceptability among the target readers.

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

This paper is independently completed by Mingzhi Ran.

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