

# A Study on the Translation Strategies and Methods of Chinese Proverbs from the Perspective of the Skopos Theory

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**Abstract:** The translation of Chinese proverbs plays a significant role in the external communication and dissemination of traditional Chinese culture. In order to better convey Chinese proverbs to target language recipients, translators of Chinese proverbs, from the perspective of the Skopos theory, flexibly adopt the translation strategies of foreignization and domestication, and translation methods like literal translation, amplification, annotation, omission, substitution, and naturalization. Translation of Chinese proverbs from the perspective of the Skopos theory not only preserve Chinese culture behind the proverbs, but also take the acceptability and readability into account.

**Keywords:** The Skopos Theory; Chinese Proverbs; Translation Strategies and Methods

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## 1. Introduction

Culture is the blood of national inheritance, culture is also the spiritual home of the people. Cultural confidence is a powerful force rooted in the heart of the people, and inheriting excellent traditional Chinese culture is also an important link in the great rejuvenation of the nation.

Chinese proverbs are words and phrases condensed in daily life and labor production, shining with the brilliance of language art and reflecting traditional Chinese culture and customs. Under the background of emphasizing “cultural confidence”, the translation of Chinese proverbs into English is particularly important in the dissemination of traditional Chinese culture.

## 2. Overview of the Skopos Theory

The Skopos theory, which takes its name from the Greek “skopos” meaning “purpose”, is a translation theory developed in Germany in the late 1970s (Vermeer, 1978) and is the most important of the functionalist translation theories. It reflects a general shift from the dominant linguistic theory of translation to a more functional and sociocultural oriented theory of translation. Katharina Reiss introduced functionalism into translation for the first time, arguing that translation should have communicative functions and that translation should attach importance to the function of the translation in the target language. Vermeer introduced the Skopos theory into the field of translation as a professional term for translation theory and translation behavior.

The core viewpoint of Vermeer’s Skopos theory is that the translator’s translation strategy and translation method are determined by translation purposes. The Skopos theory holds that translation is the result of negotiation between the source text and the target text, and translation is goal-oriented and follows a series of principles to achieve the communicative purpose of translation. The three basic rules are the skopos rule, the coherence rule, and the fidelity rule.

The skopos rule is the most important, and the other two rules are subordinate to the skopos rule. The skopos rule asserts that neither the source text nor the recipient of the translation determines the translation process, but rather the intended function or purpose of the translator.

The second rule of the Skopos theory is the coherence rule, which refers to the standard of intra-textual coherence, that is, the readability and acceptability of the translation. It stipulates that translation must be coherent enough so that the recipient of the translation can understand the translation in their own knowledge background and context. Translation should take into account language habits of target recipients.

The fidelity rule is the third principle of the Skopos theory, which focuses on the “intertextual coherence” between the translation and the original text. Vermeer believes that the translation should be faithful to the original text.

The three rules of the Skopos theory complement each other. Translators must put the purpose in the first place in the process of trans-

lation and combine appropriate translation strategies and methods to achieve communicative goals.

### **3. Translation Strategies and Methods from the Perspective of the Skopos Theory**

#### **3.1 Foreignization under the Guidance of the Skopos theory**

Foreignization means that the translator tries to get closer to the author and retains both the meaning and the form of the original text. Foreignization is mainly used to maintain the national and cultural characteristics of the original language and deliver the translation with distinctive foreign characteristics to the target recipient. Foreignization is adopted in the translation of Chinese proverbs in order to preserve the characteristics of traditional Chinese culture, so that readers of the target text can have the most direct understanding of Chinese proverbs. Under the guidance of the Skopos theory, the following translation methods can be adopted:

##### *3.1.1 Literal Translation under the Guidance of the Skopos Theory*

There is a Chinese proverb, “tiao jin huang he ye xi bu qing” which is translated as “Even if one jumped into the Yellow River, one can not wash himself clean.” Readers of the translation may not know that the Yellow River is the mother river of the Chinese people, nor do they know that it is fast and muddy, but it is not difficult to understand that jumping into the river must be carrying an unspeakable grievance. This literal translation retains the national characteristics of the original language, and can also be understood by readers of the target language, which conforms to the fidelity rule. The fidelity rule advocates that the translation should be faithful to the original text, so the translation of this sentence not only retains the cultural characteristics of the original text, but also will not cause trouble to the recipient’s understanding.

##### *3.1.2 Amplification under the Guidance of the Skopos Theory*

The Chinese proverb “sheng chen ba zi” is literally translated as “eight characters” adding “consisting of the hour, day, month, and year of one’s birth, each being represented by two characters of the Celestial and Terrestrial Cycles”. Literal translation preserves the characteristics of the original text to the greatest extent, but it is not conducive to the understanding of recipients of the translation. Readers of the translation do not know the specific meaning of the “eight characters” here. After adding the modifiers, readers of the translation can understand that the “eight characters” in the translation refer to the Celestial and Terrestrial Cycles of the specific year, month, day and time of human birth, with two characters in each column, so there are a total of eight characters. In addition, it can also understand the linguistic characteristics of the original text and increase the exotic characteristics of the target text. The Skopos rule maintains that the purpose of translation determines the translation method, and amplification is a common method to promote cultural exchanges between different nationalities.

##### *3.1.3 Literal translation plus Annotation under the Guidance of the Skopos Theory*

“Qian li zhi xing shi yu zu xia” is translated as “a thousand-li journey begins with the first step--the highest eminence is to be gained step by step”the Chinese unit of length “li” is translated literally. After the literal translation, a short sentence is added after the dash to explain the literal translation of the original text and make the translation more natural in the context of the target language. The Skopos rule holds that translation should focus on translation target, which is the key to cross-cultural communication.

#### **3.2 Domestication from the Perspective of the Skopos Theory**

Domestication advocates the localization of the source language and adopts language that target readers are accustomed to in order to better convey the meaning of the original text. Its purpose is to enhance the readability and fluency of the target text. Based on the Skopos theory, the naturalized translation of proverbs can adopt the following translation methods:

##### *3.2.1 Omission under the Guidance of the Skopos Theory*

Chinese proverb “yi yan ji chu, si ma nan zhui” means that once a word is said, even a carriage pulled by four horses can not catch up with, that is, the words must be counted. This sentence is neat in form with allusions and implied meanings. If the information in this sentence is not selected during translation, the overall translation will obscure the key points of the sentence. The language of English is simple and direct, so this proverb is translated as “A promise is a promise.” This conforms to the Skopos rule. By selecting and translating the main information, the communicative purpose is achieved, and complex information is simplified. The translation conforms to the coherence rule,

which advocates that the target text should conform to the standard of intralingual coherence, fully consider the language habits of the target language and the acceptability of target language recipients, so that the target text can better conform to the simple and direct expression habits of English and the reading habits of the target readers.

### 3.2.2 *Substitution under the Guidance of the Skopos Theory*

Chinese proverb “yu bang xiang zheng, yu weng de li” says that a snipe and a clam fought, the two sides did not give in to each other, but a fisherman passing by caught them all in one net. It is a metaphor for the conflict between the two sides, both sides are hurt, and the third party benefits. It is translated as “Two dogs strive for a bone, and a third runs away with it.” Although the snipe, clam and fisherman in the original text are not mentioned, the translation also accurately expresses the meaning, and conforms to the cultural characteristics of the target language. The language is simple, the expression is direct, and the skopos rule is followed.

### 3.2.3 *Naturalization under the Guidance of the Skopos Theory*

Chinese proverb “ge qiang you er” is translated as “walls have ears”, which adopts the technique of naturalization. Under the guidance of the coherence rule, the translation of the proverb applies the original idiom in English, which not only maintains the meaning of the original text, but also enhances the psychological identity of the target language readers and thus improves the acceptability of the translation.

## 4. Conclusion

From the analysis of the translation of proverbs in this paper, we can see that some translations attach importance to the purpose of translation, namely the skopos rule. Some translations emphasize the readability and acceptability of the target text, that is, the coherence rule, while others advocate that the target text should maintain interlingual consistency with the original text, that is, the fidelity rule. When translating under the guidance of the Skopos theory, the skopos rule should always be the center, and at the same time, the other two rules should complement each other. Translators should analyze the purposes of the translation and the recipients of target language first and adopt proper translation strategies and methods to achieve cross-cultural communication and spread the fine culture in Chinese proverbs.

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