Comparison Study on Vocational College Web Profiles from the Perspective of Functionalist Translation Theory

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Abstract: Within the framework of German Functionalism (Skopos theorie), this paper attempts to make a comparative analysis of the "college profile" on the websites of both Chinese and western vocational education providers by bringing the referential role of parallel texts into full play, so as to improve the quality of the English translation of college web profiles and ensure the accuracy of information transmission, and achieve the goal of communication.

Keywords: PCollege profile; Functionalist Translation Approach; Parallel Text

1. Introduction

The development of higher vocational education in China is in a period of rapid development, and it is committed to strengthening international cooperation, especially to establish a number of high-level vocational colleges with international influence. English websites are an important way for foreign educational organizations and the public to learn about vocational colleges in China. In order to better enhance foreign exchanges and cooperation, the role of English webpage cannot be underestimated. At present, the English college profiles on the websites of Chinese vocational colleges are mostly translated based on the Chinese versions, many of which fail to take into account the acceptability and communicative function of the translation.

Translation of college profiles falls into the category of pragmatic translation. The German functionalist translation approach (also known as "Skopos theorie") represented by Reiss,Vermeer and Nord is of great significance for pragmatic translation(Fang, 2003). The core idea is that translation is a purposeful behavior, and pragmatic translation has a strong purpose, that is, the translation should have a clear intended function, including both "informative" and "appellative one"(Fan, 2009) in the target language, and the original text is just one of several "offers of information"(Nord, 2001) that translators can use. In this study, the English web profiles of Chinese vocational colleges are regarded as the translation of Chinese versions, and will be compared with parallel texts with the same function of their counterparts, so as to analyze whether the purpose of translation is achieved.

2. Study samples and mode

2.1 Samples

Samples herein consist of a number of Chinese vocational colleges, community colleges in the United States and Canada, and TAFE colleges in Australia, in view of the fact that they all provide vocational education with similar education philosophy and teaching modes which bring similar textual context. The college profiles on the homepages of the above colleges are used as objects of the study. "college profile" or "web profile"herein refers to the brief introductory texts of colleges, which may appear under different titles on websites of different colleges, such as College Profile,

College Overview，About ..., Overview of..., An introduction to... etc., and will be regarded as the same due to their similar functions.

2.2 Study mode

According to Snell-Hornby, the more practical a text is, the clearer its function is, and the more its translation tends to be centered on the target language(Snell-Hornby, 2001). According to the principle of "intratextual coherence rule", the content and form of the translated text should be as close as possible to the linguistic and cultural norms and practices of the target language, so as to give full play to the information and appellative functions of the translated text and achieve the purpose of translation. As far as the pragmatic translation is concerned, it is suggested that the target text should use the characteristics of the parallel text as references in terms of content, expression, rhetoricity, format and cultural norms, and keep consistent with the parallel text of the target language. Therefore, the parallel text of the target language is a very important frame of reference in Chinese-English pragmatic translation. Lin Kenan summed up the principle of pragmatic translation as "read, translate and write"(Lin, 2003). The "read" here means to read a large number of authentic materials in English, and to "translate" means to express the idea, not verbatim, but by applying a similar writing format, terminology and phraseology, just like its English counterpart under the same circumstances.

Therefore, this study makes a comparative analysis of the language, content and way of presentation of college profiles with similar genre and type, and same communicative function from the dimensions of text, structure, cultural differences, rhetoric style, summarizes the similarities and differences between the parallel texts, analyzes translation errors and find out their causes.

3. Text comparison and analysis

3.1 Structure

In the samples, many western colleges do not offer comprehensive and separate

web profiles, the contents of which usually fall into several columns, such as "About Us", "Our Campus", "Our History", "Our Vision", "Quick Facts", "Message from the President" and so on, with varied layout and proportion. For example, some colleges focus on introducing the programs provided, while others emphasize campus facilities and services, or cooperation with industries and enterprises, and employment prospects, etc.

Most of the web profiles of Chinese vocational colleges in the samples have relatively complete text structures, and the sequence of content often follows a linear progression and tends to be stereotypical. For instance, there are the history and geographical location of the college at the beginning, usually followed by the introduction of its development, programs, faculty, awards and honors, international exchanges and industry cooperation, etc., and the future vision at the end, all of which are structured in paragraphs comprehensively. There are also a few colleges that adopt western style layout, such as Ningbo Polytechnic, which devides its web profile into three columns of "Vision & Mission", "Facts & Figures" and "Message from President".

3.2 Content

Names. Higher vocational education in Australia is mainly provided by TAFE (Technical and Further Education) colleges. In terms of college names, most TAFE colleges sampled adopt the mode of "XXX Institute of TAFE" or "XXX College of TAFE", such as Holmesglen Institute of TAFE, West Coast College of TAFE, some "XXX Institute of Technology", such as Hunter Institute of Technology, and some XXX Institute, such as Box Hill Institute. Higher vocational education in the United States and Canada is mainly provided by community colleges and applied technology colleges, such as Ivy Tech Community College, Davis Applied Technology College, Vancouver Community College, Seneca College of Applied Arts and Technology, etc. There are also examples like Centennial College, George Brown College, both of whom reveal neither the location nor the form of education.

The higher vocational education providers in China name themselves in a relatively fixed pattern, i.e. combining the city or location name with " 职业技术学院 ". Some might add the word indicating its specialty. On the contrary, the English translations of their names differ tremendously. In this research sample alone, there are "Vocational and Techni-

cal College/Institute", "Vocational Technical College", "Polytechnic", "Polytechnic College/Institute", "Technical College", "Institute of Technology", "Vocational Institute of Technology"and "Institute of Vocational Technology", such as Shenzhen Polytechnic, Shaanxi Polytechnic Institute, Nanjing Institute of Industry Technology, Hangzhou Vocational & Technical College,Tianjin Vocational Institute, Qingdao Technical College and so on.

This partly reflects different views on the concept of vocational education. Some claim that vocational education itself includes technical education, while others think that there are clear differences between the two, which, therefore, should be translated respectively and completely. There are divergent views from the language perspective as well. Some people regard both " 职业 " and " 技术 " as nouns, some adjectives, and others think that " 职业 " is an adjective describing the noun " 技术 ".

3.2.2 Text and message. As mentioned above, different aspects of the introduction to the colleges often go to different columns. Therefore, the "Overview" or "About us" section tends to be quite concise, generally about three to four hundred words. They normally begin with the history and location of the colleges, and state the mission and vision briefly to give readers a quick overall impression. Details about faculties, programs, facilities, features and achievements, in which potential applicants or future students might be interested, are easily accessible by following web links.

The introduction to Chinese vocational colleges in the samples usually tries to convey a large amount of information via long passages up to one or two thousand words. The content includes but is not limited to the geographical location, historical evolution, development, names of departments, numbers of faculties and books in libraries, facilities, college-enterprise cooperation programs, social services, international exchanges, goals and visions. Moreover, colleges tend to list their awards, honorary titles or certifications issued by government to demonstrate the outstanding performance. For example:

XXX has been awarded a series of academic honors, such as one Excellent Program of China, two Teaching Reform Piloting Program authorized by the Ministry of Education, two Programs Funded by the Central Government, nine Model Programs of China, four Piloting Teaching Reform Programs of the XXX Province , and ten Brand Programs of XXX Province .

It is currently a national model of higher vocational college, a nationally advanced college of vocational education, and one of the annual top fifty nationally advanced colleges for graduates employment.

The Internet brings people dense information more than enough. It is difficult for foreign browsers to have the patience to read a long and obscure web profile. Therefore, the translation should be as concise and clear as possible, and redundant information should be deleted.

3.2.3 Presentation of Information. Western colleges sampled are more likely to present the information in diversified and reader-friendly ways, including charts, figures, pictures, video clips, even multimedia applications like virtual campus tour. Many offer a sector of "Quick Facts", which enables visitors to get the key information directly and promptly. Chinese vocational colleges mostly post just texts, though some are trying to increase the readability of their web profiles, the degree of visualization in general is not high.

3.3 Rhetoric

The web profiles of Chinese and Western colleges adopt distinct rhetorical styles. The introduction of western colleges is mostly written in the first person, or both the first and second person. The language style tends to be colloquial, with casual tones and simple sentence patterns to convey concrete information straightforwardly. For example:

We are registered to deliver professional education across the secondary, vocational education and training (VET) and higher education sectors. We offer a diverse range of courses to students, businesses and community groups.

You can study certificates, diplomas, degrees and postgraduate courses, and your qualifications will be recognised in Australia and overseas.

The web profiles of vocational colleges in China are mostly written in the third person and tend to apply formal and serious tones, abstract concepts and long and complex sentence patterns. College introductions in Chinese often employ rhetorical devices such as parallelism, antithesis, repetition and metaphor to polish up, which is in line with the habit of composition in Chinese. However, very likely it gives little practical information when literally translated and doesn't

make much sense to English readers. For example:

XXX will keep working along the direction of "leading reform, supporting development, Chinese characteristics, world standard higher vocational school", and strive to build a "high-level vocational school with Chinese characteristics".

3.4 Culture

College profiles are inevitably influenced by ideologies and cultures. The comparison of parallel texts also reveals the cultural differences between China and the West to some extent. Western college profiles in samples reflect a clearer definition of audiences and a more likely users- or customers-centered value, focusing on the introduction of student enrollment, scholarship applications, teacher recruitment, industry cooperation, etc. Chinese vocational colleges emphasize more on government support, policy orientation, and their responses to social and economic changes and national macro policies. For instance:

With the guidance of the national strategy of 'One Belt and One Road', we will make every effort to promote Chinese education worldwide, so as to firmly enhance the internationalization of education and soft power of *** Polytechnic.

However, pragmatic errors appear frequently when the contents are translated literally without giving annotations or considering the cultural norms of the target language. For example, expressions like "Middle-aged and Young Experts with Outstanding Contributions" and "Most Beautiful teacher" as honors bestowed on teachers will bring confusion to readers.

4. Conclusion

The Functionalist Translation Approach requires that the translation should conform to the intended purpose of the original text. Therefore, it is particularly important to determine the expected function and readers of the translation, the neglect of which can result in poor performances. Meanwhile, due to the different communicative environments of the original and the target language, the translation may be inconsistent with the cultural expectations of the target readers, affect the acceptability of the target language, or even cause conflict in values if appropriate translation strategies are not adopted.

The intended readers of the English web profiles of Chinese vocational colleges are most probably foreign vocational education providers or industries who want to carry out exchanges and cooperation, or foreign students and workers who want to study or get training in these colleges. "Most of them lack background knowledge about Chinese language, culture and society, which requires the translator to make appropriate adjustments to the translation, such as supplementing relevant background knowledge and doing some explanatory translation."(Fan, 2005: 70)

It is concluded that many English web profiles of Chinese vocational colleges sampled in this study are translated from the Chinese version sentence by sentence with little consideration of the target language norms and culture differences. The suggestion is that effective use of parallel texts within the framework of Functionalism should be made to ensure the "same information quality and professional level"(Cohen,2005), improve the readability and acceptability of the translation, so that the functional equivalence for web profile translation can be achieved.

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