



Chinese Corporate Profiles Translation: A German Functionalist Perspective

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Abstract

With the trend of economic globalization, more and more Chinese companies are using bilingual webpage as a new channel to penetrate into international markets. Online English corporate profiles play a very important role in the establishment of a company's public image on international economic stages. However the quality of C-E translation is far from satisfactory as a result of ignoring target readers' habit of expression and cultural differences, which has a negative impact on the penetration of Chinese products into international markets. Based on 24 authentic and reliable samples of corporate profiles, the paper analyzes the Chinese corporate profiles' different features from that of companies of English speaking countries and classifies the translation errors into three categories: pragmatic translation errors, cultural translation errors and linguistic translation errors. Error samples and suggested versions are given to analyze the types and causes of errors. With the German functionalist approaches as its framework, the paper puts forward some strategies to avoid the translation errors and improve the C-E translation quality of Chinese corporate profiles.

Key words: Functionalist approaches; Corporation profiles; Translation strategies; Skopostheorie

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INTRODUCTION

More and more Chinese companies resort to internet as a platform to market their products, and the English version of the corporate profiles means a lot to the establishment of their international images and effects of products propaganda. However, the quality of the English version of the corporate profiles is far from satisfactory. To improve the quality, translators must have a thorough understanding of the differences between Chinese corporate profiles and Western corporate profiles. Moreover, the avoidance and correction of translation errors must be based on efforts in two aspects. Firstly, translators should accurately know the categories of errors. Secondly high quality translation should be guided by a right translation theory. Therefore the paper classifies the translation errors into linguistic, pragmatic and cultural categories. Functionalist approaches are chosen to guide the translation, because the theory emphasizes that translation should be target-oriented and the target readers' background knowledge, culture and convention should be given full consideration when choosing translation strategies.

1. FUNCTIONS OF CORPORATE PROFILES

Online corporate profile refers to communicative messages of a company published on the company's website, the content of which mainly covers the corporate history, quantity and quality of human resource, corporate financial and physical property, scope of business, its reputation, selling points of its goods, organizational and management structure, geographical location and contact information. The functions of corporate profiles lie in the following three aspects.

1.1 Informative Function

Firstly, it has informative function. A good corporate

profile should be complete with all necessary information that target readers need for decision making. The missing of any necessary aspects will cause delayed and inefficient business. Here are the first three paragraphs of a company's profile:

Dalian Jingang Group Co., Ltd. (hereinafter referred to as Jingang Group), founded in 1992, was restructured into a limited liability company in 1999.

Jingang Group now has 9 holding enterprises, 8 share-holding enterprises, 5 Sino-foreign joint ventures and 1 subordinate branch office, with a registered capital of RMB140, 072,400.

Jingang Group covers the industries and fields of fine chemical industry, biopharmacy, machining, real estate development, construction and building materials, municipal works, industrial park rental, hotel and restaurant.

The above profile keeps the target readers well informed of the necessary information such as the history, business scope, corporate financial and physical property, organizational and management structure, etc..

1.2 Promotion Function

Secondly, it has a function to promote public relations. A well designed and translated corporate profile will greatly enhance a company's public image and reputation. A typical example of this is that many enterprises use the title of "top global 500", "top national 500" or "top provincial 500" to show its power and status in a particular field.

The following is a typical example:

The enterprise has been awarded "the largest ship unloaded manufacture enterprise in China" by State Council. The enterprise has achieved "China famous brand" for overhead traveling crane and portal crane.

In the profile the enterprise is trying to establish an ideal public image by introducing the awards it has won, which leaves the target readers with an impression of its high reputation.

1.3 Vocative Function

Thirdly, it has a vocative function. In order to stimulate the interest of potential customers the corporate profile tries to highlight the selling points of the products.

Here is an example of product description extracted from the online profile of Dalian Machine Tool Group Corporation (DMTG):

DMTG's five product lines with 300 variations consist of (1) Special purpose machines with flexible manufacturing systems; (2) vertical and horizontal machining centers; (3) CNC lathes including turning and milling centers; (4) high speed precision lathes and machine tool accessories; (5) auto power assembly and power transmission components.

The detailed description the selling points plays an important role in stimulating the interests of the potential customers.

2. C-E TRANSLATION ERRORS IN CORPORATE PROFILES

The classification of translation errors could be done from different aspects. Wilss (1982, p. 201) defines a translation error as "an offence against a norm in a linguistic contact situation." While Nord (2001, p.73-75) defines "translation error" from functionalist perspectives, which no longer evaluates the quality according to how the target texts faithfully reflect the source texts. He claims that "If the purpose of a translation is to achieve a particular function for the target addressee, anything that obstructs the achievement of this purpose is a translation error." Corporate profiles are publicity texts which are quite different from literary texts in terms of their function and they are often defined as "pragmatic" or "non-literary" texts (Reiss, 1989, p.106). With the definition of translation errors in a broad sense, the paper analyzes the translation errors in data collected from Liaoning 500 top industrial enterprises in 2011, which can well reflect the current situation of corporate profile translation. Guided by Nord's theory, this paper classifies the translation errors into three categories: linguistic translation errors, pragmatic translation errors and cultural translation errors.

2.1 Linguistic Translation Errors

Linguistic mistakes include wrong spelling, wrong use of punctuation, improper choice of words, errors in sentence structure, logic mistakes, wrong use of tense and voice. The following examples excerpted from genuine materials are demonstrating each of the mistakes.

2.1.1 Spelling Mistakes

Due to the carelessness of translators some spelling mistakes are found in corporate profiles, and they greatly affect the quality of communicative function.

Here is an example from the authentic texts:

TT (Target Text): Bing the birthplace of China bearing industry, it was known as the hometown and cradle of this field.

"Bing" should be changed into "being".

2.1.2 Wrong Use of Articles

TT: Wafangdian Bearing Group Corporation, short for ZWZ, was initially established in 1938, restructured to be an exclusively State-Owned Company in 1995 and came to B share market as the founder member in 1997.

2.1.3 Word by Word Translation

ST (Source Text): 為商貿、文化、娛樂、體育、餐飲等第三產業提供廣闊的發展平臺，從而帶動所在城市的產業結構調整；

TT: Provide a broad development platform for service industries such as commerce & trade, culture, entertainment, sports and food & beverages, thereby promoting industrial restructuring in the cities where the complexes are located;

"餐飲" in the source text is literally translated into "food & beverages" which does not exactly convey the

meaning of the source text and should be changed into “catering business”.

2.1.4 Run-on Sentences

A run-on sentence is a sentence in which two or more independent clauses (that is, complete sentences) are joined with no punctuation or conjunction. Here is an example:

ST: 目前禾豐集團擁有85家子公司，產品覆蓋25個省市，並遠銷朝鮮、尼泊爾、越南、韓國、伊朗、俄羅斯等國家。

TT: Currently, Wellhope controls 85 subsidiaries, it has a market presence in over 25 provinces across China, the products are being exported to Nepal, Vietnam, South Korea, Iran and Russia, etc.

Run-on sentence can be corrected by either using a semicolon or using a conjunction with a comma.

The above translation could be improved this way:

RT: Currently, Wellhope has 85 subsidiaries, whose products cover 25 provinces and are also exported to Nepal, Vietnam, South Korea, Iran and Russia, etc.

2.1.5 Mistakes in Word Usage

ST: 禾豐是“民營企業博士後科研基地”，集團現擁有百余名博士、碩士、教授、專家組成的技術隊伍。

TT: Wellhope is the official hosting center for postdoctoral research fellows with a technical team composing by more than a hundred PhDs, M.S. degrees, professors and experts.

The word “compose” means “to make up the constituent parts of”. The phrase “be composed of something” is used to express “something is formed a number of substances, parts, or people”. For instance, “Water is composed of hydrogen and oxygen.”

The above translation could be improved this way:

RT: Wellhope is the official hosting center for postdoctoral research fellows with a technical team composed of more than a hundred doctors, masters, professors and other experts.

2.2 Pragmatic Translation Errors

“Pragmatic translation errors are caused by inadequate solution to pragmatic translation problems such as lack of receiver orientation” (Nord, 2001, p.75). Translators make pragmatic translation errors when they fail to translate information that is important to target readers or add some unnecessary information in the process of translation. Both of these improper handling of information will affect the effect of the function of the text.

ST: 我們將認真貫徹科學發展觀，大力促進……

TT: We will conscientiously implement the scientific outlook on development and greatly promote the…

Target readers will show no interest in the content of “scientific outlook” in the target text, and this insignificant, redundant or irrelevant information should be deleted.

2.3 Cultural Translation Errors

“The use of language is also shaped and socialized through culture” (Kramersch, 2000, p.6). Due to different cultures languages may have their own characteristics of expression. For example, Chinese corporate profiles always use idiomatic expressions with a purpose to deeply impress target readers. Slogans are also frequently used at the end of a Chinese corporate profile.

Here is an example:

ST: 曙光汽車集團秉承打造百年曙光、國際曙光、開放曙光的理念，與客戶和合作夥伴們一起，共創美好未來！

TT: SG Group is committed to be a centennial SG, Global SG with open mind, and together with our customers and partners, we strive for better future.

The above cultural translation errors are caused by the translators’ negligence of cultural norms of the target language by translating literally the flowery expressions into target texts. These slogans may sound very much encouraging and persuasive to Chinese readers with relevant cultural background. But they are not meaningful to foreign target readers.

3. SOLUTIONS

The above mentioned errors derive from translators’ ignorance of translation purposes. In the process of translating corporate profiles many translators adhere to the equivalence approach. “Equivalence-based linguistic approaches focused on the source text, the features of which had to be preserved in the target text” (Nord, 2001, p.7). However, there are some cases of non-equivalence due to some pragmatic differences between source and target cultures. In order to well realize the communicative purpose of the text, the paper introduces functionalist approaches to solve the problems existing in the translation of corporate profiles. Nord defines “functionalist” as “focusing on function or functions of texts and translation” (Nord, 2001, p.1). Functionalism emphasized that translation should be target readers-oriented and the choice of translation strategies should be based on the intended purpose of translation and the function of the target text. “Functionalist approach is a kind of cover term for the research of scholars who argue that the purpose of the TT is the most important criterion in any translation” (Munday, 2001, p.78). Functionalism theory was not established overnight. It evolved from Katharina Reiss’s functionalist translation criticism and was extended by her student Hans J. Vermeer who proposed Skopostheorie. And later “Christiane Nord’s more detailed text analysis model continued the functionalist tradition in the 1990’s (Munday, 2001, p.73). Skopos theory is the core of functionalism. It is “a welcome addition to translation studies” (Gentzler, 2001, p.71). “Skopos rule” should be followed in the process of translating. And the selection of translation strategies

and methods are determined by the purpose that the text is intended to achieve, that is, “the end justifies the means” (Reiss & Vermeer, 1984, p.101). Skopos theory reflects “a more functionally and socio-culturally oriented concept of translation” (Baker, 2001, p.35). With Skopos, translator can be released from the “restrictions imposed by a narrowly defined concept of loyalty to the source text alone” (Baker, 2004, p.238).

Translator is responsible for analyzing the features and type of source texts and realizing the original purposes that the source texts want to convey to the target readers.

The three types of linguistic errors, pragmatic translation errors and cultural translation errors will lead to ineffective communication and delayed business deals in the business world. Pragmatic and cultural translation errors are more difficult to resolve than linguistic errors. The following strategies are suggested to improve the quality of corporate profile translation.

3.1 Annotation

Due to different cultural backgrounds, translators may find it difficult to find English equivalence for typical Chinese cultural terms such as “十二五”. Annotation is a proper strategy to compensate the vacancy.

Here is an example:

ST: 企業通過了HACCP食品安全管理體系雙認證

TT: The enterprise has the certificate of HACCP.

RT: The enterprise has the certificate of HACCP (Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point).

ST: “三改一加強” 提高了企業的競爭力。

TT: The policy of “Three transformations and one strengthening” enhances the enterprise’s competitive competences.

RT: The policy of “Three transformations and one strengthening, namely, “the reform, reorganization, upgrading and better management of enterprises”, enhances the enterprise’s competitive competences.

3.2 Abridgement

The unnecessary and unimportant information in the source text will severely affect the communicative effect of the text. And the important contents that should be highlighted are just given insufficient emphasis. Redundant information includes those political slogans such as “創新、求實、拼爭、奉獻”，“鞍鋼集團公司擁有雄厚的企業文化資源，在各個歷史時期都湧現出了標誌性的優秀人物，如，雷鋒精神的傳人郭明義等”，unimportant awards and titles such as “中國鋼鐵工業的搖籃”，“市花園式工廠”，“省綠化先進單位”，and high-sounding words such as “最先進的視聽產品”，“高起點、強投入”。

Here is a complete example:

ST: 公司堅持“與時俱進、創新開放、以人為本、迎接挑戰”的工作方針……

TT: The Company follows the work principle of “keeping pace with the times, opening and innovating,

human central, meeting challenge”.

The invalid information abridgement is a proper strategy to deal with the redundant information in source text.

3.3 Summarization

Summarization can be used to solve the problem of redundant information.

Here is a genuine example:

ST: 被國家六部委評定為國家大型企業，列全國民營企業500強第40位，納稅居省民企前茅。連續十幾年被遼寧省工商局評為省“守合同重信用”先進單位，被國家工商局評為全國“守合同重信用企業”、“中國馳名商標”。被遼寧省政府評為“遼寧省高新技術企業”。

TT: The Company was ranked by The Department and Commissions of the State as “China National Large Business Enterprise”, “The No.40 out of China Top 500 Private Business”. In Liaoning Province, it was listed as “Top Tax-Paying Private Company in Liaoning”, “Business with Top Commercial Credibility” by Liaoning Bureau of Commerce and Industry, “Famous Trademarks in Liaoning Province”, “Business with Top Commercial Credibility” by National Bureau of Commerce and Industry, “Chinese Famous Trademark”, “Liaoning High-tech enterprise”, “Provincial Level enterprise technology center”, and “Liaoning Engineering technology Research Center” by Liaoning Provincial Government.

This corporate profile uses a whole paragraph to introduce the company’s certificates and prizes with an intention to demonstrate its excellence and reputation and win the trust of potential customers. However, the English version may not achieve the same effect as the Chinese text, because the target readers are not quite familiar with Chinese awarding system.

RT: Our Company has been well-established and highly reputable due to its constant and long time efforts in quality improvement and product upgrade.

CONCLUSION

In order to become universally recognized in international market and to demonstrate its image and strength through publicity we can’t afford to ignore the importance of improving the quality of C-E translation of corporate profiles. The paper suggests that translation guided by functionalist approach can improve the effect of corporate profile translation. It is hoped that the result of the study will help to improve the qualities of Chinese companies’ overseas propaganda.

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