Literature, Language and Cultural Studies
ISSN Print: 3079-5095
ISSN Online: 3079-5109
https://doi.org/10.63313/LLCS.9147

Research on Translation Strategies of Business English Contracts from the Perspective of Skopos Theory

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How to cite this paper: Wang, J. Q. (2026). Research on Translation Strategies of Business English Contracts from the Perspective of Skopos Theory. *Literature, Language and Cultural Studies*, 4(3), 88 - 94. ISSN Print: 3079 - 5095; ISSN Online: 3079 – 5109.
https://doi.org/10.63313/LLCS.9147
Published: 2026-03-27

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Abstract

Global economic integration makes cross-border economic and trade cooperation more frequent. Business English contracts are core legal document to clarify rights and responsibilities of both parties and ensure transaction security. The translation quality can affect the success of cooperation and legitimate rights. Because business English contracts are professional and rigorous, and they have standardized format, involving knowledge from multiple fields, traditional equivalence translation theories are hard to meet their functional requirements. This can lead to translation deviations and legal risks. As the core theory of functional translation, Skopos theory says that "translation purpose determines translation strategy", and it can provide support for solving this dilemma. In fact, we use the perspective of functionalism and analyze the textual characteristics and translation difficulties of business English contracts. Also we explore translation strategies for this. This aims to enrich the practical application of functionalism, provide reference for translation practitioners, and help promote cross-cultural business communication. It can make up the gap between theory and practice in current research, and provide ideas for similar studies.

Keywords

Teleology; Business English Contract; Translation

1. Introduction

Now global economic integration is accelerating and cross-border trade increases. Business English contracts serve as core legal documents which clarify rights and obligations of both parties and is expected to ensure transaction security, so the translation quality can affect success or failure of cooperation and legitimate rights and interests of both parties.[1] Business English contracts combine professionalism and rigor with standardization. They cover multiple fields such as law and business. This places high demands on accuracy of translation and we should pay attention to this problem. Under traditional equivalence translation theory, translation methods which focus too much on literal equivalence can be hard to adapt to functional

requirements of business English contracts, and this creates problems in practice for translators when they deal with real cases. They may cause translation deviations and can lead to legal disputes and economic losses. In this context, Skopos theory is the core of functional translation theory. It says that translation purpose determines translation strategy. This breaks limitations of traditional translation theory and provides a new theoretical perspective for translating business English contracts which can help us understand the translation process better and avoid some previous problems that existed in old methods when we deal with business texts. It can resolve contradiction between practicality and normativity in translation. So exploring translation strategies for business English contracts based on perspective of Skopos theory has important research value and practical necessity. It is worth noting that this can help improve translation practice.

2. Theoretical Overview

2.1. Skopos Theory and Business English Contract Translation

As a key part of functional translation theory, Skopos theory appeared in Germany in the 1970s. It was proposed by Hans Vermeer and other scholars. The main view is that translation purpose decides translation strategy. This view breaks the limit of traditional equivalence theory and can provide theoretical basis for business English contract translation.[2] Business English contract translation works as legal carrier for cross-border trade. It is a purposeful cross-cultural communication. The main purpose is to convey contract information, clarify rights and responsibilities of both parties, and ensure transaction security. This matches the core demands of teleology. Teleology has three principles including purpose, coherence and loyalty. They provide direction, methods and bottom line for contract translation. The purpose principle requires translators to put accurate transmission of core terms first based on contract type and usage scenario. The coherence principle guides translators to improve sentence structures to fit target language habits so the translation is smooth and easy to understand. The loyalty principle ensures the translation is true to legal meaning and business intent of original text, and it avoids wrong translation. In practice, Skopos theory can solve difficulties in professional terms, complex sentences, cultural gaps and legal barriers. The translation can fit target language norms and reach the purpose of ensuring transaction security. It is important theoretical guidance for business English contract translation.[3]

2.2. Core requirements for translating business English contracts

Business English contracts have special legal attributes and business functions. It is worth noting that we should meet four basic requirements in translation: accuracy, standardization, rigor, and readability. These four aspects can support each other and none can be missing. Accuracy is very important for translation because we should

understand the meaning of professional terms, legal provisions and digital information in the contract, and we can avoid mistranslation and omission.[4] For example, "force majeure" should be translated as "force majeure" to avoid legal disputes from terminology deviations. Standardization means the translation should follow stylistic norms of both Chinese and English contracts, including consistency in sentence structure, formatting, terminology usage and other aspects, so that the translation can have the formality of legal document. Rigorousness is reflected in logical rigor. The expression should be precise without ambiguity or loopholes.[5] It is necessary to handle complex long sentences and legal provisions, clarify the boundaries of rights and responsibilities between both parties, and avoid disputes from vague expressions. Readability requires the translation to conform to reading habits of target language. We should optimize sentence structure while maintaining rigor and avoid rigidity and obscurity. In fact, both parties to the contract can understand the content of terms and it helps the execution of contract and dispute resolution. These four requirements are in line with essential characteristics of business contracts. Also, they are a key prerequisite for achieving translation purposes and ensuring the smooth progress of cross-border transactions.[6]

3. The Problems in Translating Business English Contracts from the Perspective of Skopos Theory

3.1. Difficulties in terminology translation

In business English contract translation, terminology translation is the main difficulty. Its core issue includes the professionalism, uniqueness, consistency and other characteristics of terms. This can directly affect legal validity of the contract and rights of both parties. Business English contracts include law, business, finance, trade and other fields. The terminology is dense and semantics is rigorous. Each term has fixed professional meaning and it cannot be replaced or misinterpreted. For example, legal terms like "force majeure", "breach of contract" and "liquidated damages" have unique translations. Any mistranslation can result in invalidation of contract terms or legal disputes. At the same time, the same term should be translated uniformly in different contract types. For example, "consideration" should be uniformly translated as "consideration" in contracts. If there are different translations like "remuneration" and "cost", it can cause ambiguity. Also, the differences in legal culture between East and West have led to some terms not being fully equivalent in translation, such as "tort" (infringement) in the Anglo American legal system, which does not have fully corresponding concept in continental legal system. Therefore, it is necessary to supplement explanation with context. It is worth noting that this can ensure accuracy of terms and enable readers of translated text to understand their core connotations. In fact, translators need to have solid professional knowledge and be familiar with fixed translation method of contract terms, establish a terminology database, and avoid impact of terminology translation errors on seriousness and effectiveness of

contract.

3.2. Difficulties in sentence translation

Business English contracts have complex sentence structures. This can make translation difficult. We find the main difficulties include handling long sentences and voice conversion. Also, archaic vocabulary is a problem. To achieve rigor, complex sentences are used. These contain multiple subordinate clauses, modifiers, and parallel structures. The sentences are lengthy. The logic is complex. It makes it hard for translators to understand and translate. For example, in English contracts we can see long sentences such as "Whereas the Parties hereto agree to enter into this Contract subject to the terms and conditions hereinafter set forth forth" should be broken down into subordinate clauses. We adjust the word order and translate them into short sentences fitting Chinese habits. At the same time, English contracts use passive voice to show objectivity. Chinese contracts mainly use active voice. When translating, we should change the voice and add the subject if needed. This can avoid stiff and obscure translation. Also, archaic words like "here by" and "there of" appear often. These words have strict meanings but limited use. Translators should understand their meanings and combine with Chinese contract expression habits. We translate them into concise and standard expressions. This keeps the correctness of the original text. Also, it can ensure readability. It avoids logic confusion and semantic distortion from bad sentence structure processing.

3.3. Translation difficulties caused by cultural and legal differences

The gap between culture and legal system is an important problem that people often forget in business English contract translation, and it can influence the final quality of translation work. In fact, East and West use different legal systems. China uses civil law system which focuses on written law, while the Anglo American legal system is based on case law, and some legal concepts and provisions show obvious differences from civil law system. For example, in the Anglo American legal system, "consideration" is required for making a contract, while in continental legal system there is no same concept, so when we translate we should add explanation about its main meaning to make sure readers of translation can understand its legal meaning. It is worth noting that business culture and values are different in different countries. So there are different ways to write contracts. Western contracts focus on details and logic with simple language, but Chinese contracts care more about strictness and politeness, and they use very formal expressions which can show the respect to the other party. Next, cultural differences can also be found in the way of thinking. Western thinking cares about individuals and details. Chinese thinking pays attention to the whole and connections. When translating, we should adjust the logic of expression so that it can be suitable for target culture and can be accepted by local business people. If we ignore these differences and only do literal translation, it can

cause the translation not matching the legal norms and business habits of target language, and cause misunderstandings and disputes, and affect the cross-border transactions.

4. Analysis of Translation Strategies for Business English Contracts from the Perspective of Skopos Theory

4.1. Accurate and unified adaptation, establishing a standardized system

Terminology translation has difficulties in professionalism and consistency. We can build a standardized terminology management system to achieve accurate translation. First, the translator should improve their professional knowledge. They need to organize commonly used terms in the business English contracts and distinguish the meanings of terms in different fields such as law, business, and finance. Also, they should clarify the fixed translation methods. This can avoid random substitution. As an example, "force majeure" should be translated as "force majeure" and "liquidated damages" should be translated as "liquidated damages" to avoid confusion.even in similar contracts. For terms that do not have complete equivalent translation method, we use "literal translation+supplementary annotations" can be used. For example, we translate "tort" in the Anglo American legal system as "infringement (referring to the act of infringing on the legitimate rights and interests of others due to fault)". This retains the core meaning of the original text. Also, it helps the translated readers understand its legal implications. Then, terminology verification should be done after translation and we should check the consistency and accuracy of terminology translation methods. Professional review should be conducted with the professionals to ensure that terminology translation complies with legal seriousness and professional norms of contract, and it can avoid legal risks caused by terminology translation from source.

4.2. Split optimization, voice adaptation, balancing rigor and readability

Complex long sentences, voice conversion, and archaic vocabulary make translation difficult. We propose a strategy of "splitting and combining+voice adjusting+standard conversion" can be used. We should consider both the original text rigor and the readability of translation. Complex long sentences need special treatment. We first sort out the logical hierarchy of the sentence and break down the main clause and subordinate clause, modifier components and core components. Then we reorganize the sentence structure according to the Chinese expression habit of "main clause first, secondary clause second, logical coherence". We break down long English sentences into short Chinese sentences that are easy to understand. It can preserve the logical relationships of the original text. As an example, we translate "Since the parties here agree to enter into this contract subject to the terms and conditions set forth there

here" as "Since both parties agree to sign this contract based on the following terms". We break down the clauses and simplify the expression. For passive voice, we can translate it into Chinese active voice, and if needed, we add subjects such as "both parties", "party A", "party B" to fit expression habits of Chinese contracts. For archaic words such as "here by" and "there of", we can translate them into standardized Chinese expressions based on context, for example, "here by" can be translated as "hereby" or "here", and "there of" can be translated as "its" or "among them". This can preserve the formality of the original text. Also it avoids the translation being stiff and obscure. After translation, it is necessary to read the sentence structure thoroughly, check the logical coherence and fluency of expression, and ensure that the translation conforms to Chinese grammar norms and conveys the rigor of the original text.

4.3. Accurate adaptation, supplementary explanation, achieving cross-cultural communication

Translation between different cultures and legal systems can be difficult. We should base our work on the background of both sides and try to achieve "preciseadaptation+supplementary explanation", and we should make sure the translation can follow the legal norms and business habits of target language. First, we should understand well the differences between China and West legal systems. It is worth noting that civil law and common law have core differences. We can use "literaltranslation+legal connotation supplement" approach for legal concepts with big differences. For example, when we translate "consideration", it can be translated as "consideration (meaning the price paid by both parties to the contract, which is necessary condition for contract establishment)" and readers can understand its legal meaning. Then, we should adapt to different business culture habits. Western contracts focus on simplicity. We should avoid redundant expressions when translating them. Chinese contracts focus on etiquette. We should adjust the tone during translation and use formal expressions. Also we should take into account the cultural habits of both parties. At the same time, based on differences in thinking styles, we should adjust the logical expression. Western thinking emphasizes details. We should preserve core details when translating. Chinese thinking emphasizes the whole. It is important to organize logical connections when translating so that the translation can conform to thinking habits of target language readers. Also, after translation, both parties can invite professionals to review and confirm that the translation has no cultural or legal misunderstandings. It can help achieve cross-cultural and cross-legal communication. The applicability and effectiveness of contract can be ensured.

5. Conclusion

We examine translation strategies of business English contracts from purposive

perspective. Literature review and case analysis are used to summarize theoretical points and practical experience. We introduce core connotation of teleology and its three principles. Then we analyze if it is compatible with business English contract translation and what are the core requirements. It is worth noting that text characteristics, terminology, sentence structure, and cultural and legal differences can make the translation work difficult, and we examine these four aspects to find the real problems and possible solutions. Based on three principles of purposive theory, we propose targeted translation strategies and clarify focus of different contract strategies. Also, case studies are used to verify if these strategies work in practice. We summarize conclusions and point out research shortcomings. Future research directions are also suggested in the end. In fact, this study can provide reference for translation practitioners and it can help cross-cultural business communication.

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