



RESEARCH ARTICLE

Vol. 11. Issue.2. 2024 (April-June)

ISSN INTERNATIONAL  
STANDARD  
SERIAL  
NUMBER  
INDIA  
2395-2628(Print):2349-9451(online)

Comparison of Machine Translation and Human Translation in Chinese-  
English Translation from the Perspective of Skopos Theory – – A Case  
Study of *Speech at the Ceremony Marking the Centenary of the Communist  
Party of China*

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doi: 10.33329/ijelr.11.2.19



Article information

Article Received:17/3/2024  
Article Accepted:14/04/2024  
Published online:20/04/2024

ABSTRACT

The topic regarding artificial intelligence, principally machine translation has been intensively discussed in recent years. In this paper, we examine the differences between machine translation and human translation by analyzing the English version of *Speech at the Ceremony Marking the Centenary of the Communist Party of China*. Based on the three rules of Skopos Theory, we compare the machine and human translation from the perspective of lexical, syntactical, contextual, and rhetorical devices aspects, and conclude that there is a possibility of combining two translation methods, the two can complement each other and fix their flaws.

**Keyword:** Skopos Theory; Machine Translation; Human translation; *Speech at the Ceremony Marking the Centenary of CPC.*

I. Introduction

Nowadays, because of the rapid development of the Chinese economy, the expansion of our international exchanges and operations is at a high tide, which calls for translation with high quality and high efficiency. Machine translation, a newborn translation with its inherent advantages of cost-effectiveness, stability, and controllability, can automatically select the proper word and phrase from its lexicon and finish the translation work in a quite short time. But as we all know, it still has some shortages that need to improve. Besides, as a traditional translation method, human translation has its irreplaceable advantages. Compared with machine translation, human translation can put out the subjective initiative of the translator properly to create masterpieces combining accuracy and aesthetics, which cannot be realized by machine translation. However, because of its low efficiency and stability,

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human translation cannot meet the requirements of the market today. Based on these situations, we need to consider the relationship between human translation and machine translation again and find a new way to bring the advantage of two different translation methods into full play.

Considering that the experimental result may vary depending on the stylistic feature, we need to find an example combining as many stylistic features as possible to make our research comprehensive and objective. *Speech at the Ceremony Marking the Centenary of the Communist Party of China*, an official speech with Chinese characteristics, combines the rigor of argumentation and the artistry of literature, which suits our research. Moreover, as a famous speech, this article has great value in application.

Under the guidance of Skopos theory, this essay not only represents different characteristics of human translation and machine translation by giving adequate examples but also tries to give several worthy and practical suggestions for future developments of human translation and machine translation.

## II. Theoretical Basis

The technique we applied in our study is Skopos theory. Skopos theory, a theory in the field of translation studies, employs the prime principle of a purposeful action that determines a translation strategy. Skopos rule, coherence rule, and fidelity rule are the three fundamental rules.

First, according to Vermeer's definition and Nord's translation, skopos rule enables the translation to function in the situation it is used and with the people who want to use it and precisely in the way they want it to function. Second, Coherence rule allows a translation to be acceptable in the sense that it is coherent with the receivers' situation. Third, Fidelity rule necessitates inter-textual coherence between the source and target texts.

Skopos theory applies adequacy as the measurement of translation quality rather than equivalence. This broadly aligns with the objectives of our research, which helps outline the characteristics between machine translation and human translation.

## III. The Case Analysis of Machine Translation and Human Translation in the Translation of *Speech at the Ceremony Marking the Centenary of the Communist Party of China*

To analyze the different features of machine translation and human translation clearly and comprehensively, we studied a large amount of text and analyzed many kinds of research. Based on these experiences, we have already discovered the obvious differences between these two translation methods. In this essay, we focus on *Speech at the Ceremony Marking the Centenary of the Communist Party of China* and compare the two English versions of machine translation and human translation. We present the examples and analysis systemically from four dimensions: lexical, syntactical, contextual, and rhetorical devices.

### 3.1 Differences at Lexical Level

As a political speech presented to the public, translations not only need to focus on formality but also need to pay special attention to political words, avoiding politically incorrect words. Thus when analyzing the usage of words, we need to identify whether the used words comply with the stylistic feature.

In these two translations, we can find that both of them consciously use some formal words. For the translation of proper nouns, both of them will use official translations to restore the formality of the original text. For example, they all translate “鸦片战争” as “the Opium War of 1840”, “中华民族伟大复

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兴” as “the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation”, and “中国特色社会主义” as “socialism with Chinese characteristics”, which embody the strictness, the authority and the accuracy of translations. However, there are still several flaws in the version of machine translation.

E.g.1

Source Text(ST): “戊戌变法、义和团运动、辛亥革命”

Target Text 1(TT1) (machine translation): the Wuxu Reform, the Boxer Rebellion, and the Xinhai Revolution

TT2(human translation): the Reform Movement of 1898, the Yihetuan Movement, and the Revolution of 1911

In this example, the machine doesn't use official translations like translators, lacking formality.

As we have mentioned, the original article has a strong political color and contains a wealth of political information, which asks translations to make clear of political complexion of the original work and pay attention to political sensitivity. In this part, both of them concern political elements. They translate “同志们、朋友们” as “Comrades and friends”, reflecting the united relationship between the speaker and the people. However, human translation, by contrast, does a better job in this part. Moreover, in human translation, it translates “执政党” into “governing party” while the machine translates it as “ruling party”. Since our government and party aim at serving the people, the word “governing” can reflect our party's essence better. The word “ruling”, to some extent, inclines towards autocracy, which is contrary to the original meaning and the real situation of our country.

In terms of words, their work can restore the main content of the original, which complies with the fidelity rule. But after comparison, we can find that human translation can deal with the stylistic characteristics of the original work better, embodying the original writing style.

E.g.2

ST:办好中国的事情，关键在党。

TT1: The key to running China's affairs well lies in the Party.

TT2 : China's success hinges on the Party.

While human translation accomplished more, machine translation can only match the original text in terms of "China's affairs" and "lies in." In contrast to "lies in" and "the key to," "hinges on" most accurately captures the significance of the Party in the source text while maintaining the idea of simplicity. Furthermore, the language becomes more accessible and upbeat as a result of the word classes being changed from verb to noun, rigorously adhering to the coherence and fidelity rules.

E.g.3

ST: 为实现中华民族伟大复兴提供了充满新的活力的体制保证和快速发展的物质条件。

TT1:....., providing a new dynamic institutional guarantee and material conditions for rapid development to achieve the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation.

TT2 : These achievements fueled the push toward national rejuvenation by providing institutional guarantees imbued with new energy as well as the material conditions for rapid development.

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In human translation, some words are translated without losing their point. For instance, “fueled the push toward national rejuvenation” demonstrated the inexhaustible power of national rejuvenation. It also suggests that competent translators should not only pay attention to formality but also maintain aesthetic appeal.

### 3.2 Differences at Syntactical Level

As is known to all, Chinese and English have a big difference in presenting logical relationships. Chinese is used to reflect the logic between sentences implicitly while English always shows readers the connection between the preceding and the following text directly. This linguistic difference requires the translation to restore the original logical relationship in the sentence directly to ensure the coherence and completeness of sentences.

In this part, translators are capable of distinguishing the logical relationship between sentences correctly and expressing it clearly, no matter whether it is explicit or implicit. Machine translation, however, only can translate some obvious logical relationships.

Firstly, translators can consciously add logical words to reappear the logic in sentences while machine translation only follows the original rigidly.

E.g. 4

ST: “十月革命一声炮响，给中国送来了马克思列宁主义。”

TT1 : The October Revolution brought Marxism Leninism to China with the sound of a cannon.

TT2 : With the salvoes of Russia’s October Revolution in 1917, Marxism-Leninism was brought to China.

"Marxism-Leninism" is the main idea of the statement in the original text. Finding the information focused on machine translation is not very simple. However, the logical link is well-explained thanks to the passive voice and the sentence's end-weight in human translation.

E.g. 5

ST: “勇于自我革命是中国共产党区别于其他政党的显著标志”

TT1: The courage to carry out self-revolution is a significant mark that distinguishes the CPC from other political parties.

TT2: A hallmark that distinguishes the Communist Party of China from other political parties is its courage in undertaking self-reform.

In human translation, it flexibly exchanges the position of the subject and the object, which puts the new information “its courage in undertaking self-reform” backward and puts an emphasis on the importance of this quality by using an emphatic sentence to make this sentence clear in priority and more logical.

Except for logic, in a formal article, every small mistake in sentences needs to be avoided. However, in machine translation, there are still several avoidable syntactical mistakes.

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E.g. 6

ST: “中华民族是世界上伟大的民族，有着 5000 多年源远流长的文明历史，为人类文明进步作出了不可磨灭的贡献。”

TT1: The Chinese nation is a great nation in the world, with a civilization history of over 5000 years and an indelible contribution to the progress of human civilization.

TT2: With a history of more than 5,000 years, China has made indelible contributions to the progress of human civilization.

There is a logical turning point between these two sentences although the original work does not give a direct conjunction. The main sentence of the original text is that “中华民族为人类文明进步作出了不可磨灭的贡献。” The information “世界上伟大的民族” and “有着 5000 多年源远流长的文明历史” are simply supplemental details, subordinating to the main sentence. In this case, in human translation, it uses the conjunction “with” and omits the sentence “世界上伟大的民族” to express the hypotaxis contained in the original sentence. However, in the machine translation, it mistakenly chooses “中华民族是世界上伟大的民族” as the main sentence, mistranslating the original logic of the sentence. Compared to these two translations, we can find that human translation can obey the coherence and fidelity rule better, ensuring completely restoring the inner logic within a sentence.

Secondly, translators also adjust sentence structures to emphasize the main point of source sentences while the machine still obeys the original sentence structures strictly.

### 3.3 Differences at Contextual Level

Translation, as a form of cross-cultural communication, must be carried out at the textual level (Si Xianzhu, 1999,2003). With the aim of highlighting its core content and thought, translators tend to make appropriate changes that could be presented in operating translation techniques among amplification, omission, and dividing translation units properly. The machine is restricted to correspondence at a basic level, attaching great importance to the match between form and literal meaning, not focusing on redrawing the passages and presenting the main idea.

E.g. 7

ST: “今天，在中国共产党历史上，在中华民族历史上，都是一个十分重大而庄严的日子。”

TT1: Today is a very important and solemn day in the history of the CPC and the Chinese nation.

TT2: Today, the first of July, is a great and solemn day in the history of both the Communist Party of China (CPC) and the Chinese nation.

Machine translation and human translation both do fairly well in restoring the original text, complying with the fidelity rule. Nevertheless, in human-generated translation, ‘the first of July’ is amplified. This amplification is based on the translator’s perception of temporal information and textual analysis. In human translation, it recognizes that target language text readers fail to grasp this information without translators’ assistance. On the level of texture, the human work achieves the inter-textual coherence of the discourse, following the coherence rule.

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E.g. 8

ST: 新的征程上, 我们必须坚持大团结大联合, 坚持一致性和多样性统一, 加强思想政治引领, 广泛凝聚共识, 广聚天下英才, 努力寻求最大公约数、画出最大同心圆, 形成海内外全体中华儿女心往一处想、劲往一处使的生动局面, 汇聚起实现民族复兴的磅礴力量!

TT1: On our new journey, we must adhere to the great unity and unity, adhere to consistency and unity in diversity, strengthen ideological and political guidance, build broad consensus, gather talents from all over the world, strive to seek the greatest common division and draw the greatest concentric circles, and create a vivid situation in which all Chinese people at home and abroad think and work together in one place, and gather a great force for national rejuvenation.

TT2: On the journey ahead, we must ensure great unity and solidarity and balance commonality and diversity. We should strengthen theoretical and political guidance, build broad consensus, bring together the brightest minds, and expand common ground and the convergence of interests, so that all Chinese people, both at home and overseas, can focus their ingenuity and energy on the same goal and come together as a mighty force for realizing national rejuvenation.

In the source text, although it is a complicated and long paragraph, its intersentential logic is clear. The sentences “坚持大团结大联合, 坚持一致性和多样性统一” mean theoretical policies while the sentences “加强思想政治引领, 广泛凝聚共识, 广聚天下英才, 努力寻求最大公约数、画出最大同心圆” represent practical action under the guide of theoretical policies mentioned before. And the last few sentences “形成海内外全体中华儿女心往一处想、劲往一处使的生动局面, 汇聚起实现民族复兴的磅礴力量” present the final results of all these theories and actions. The original sentence contains progressive relationship and causality, which is why in the human translation, it divides the theory and the action into two independent sentences to make a clear logical distinction and uses the conjunction “so that” to present the causality relation containing in the original work, which can make the translation more coherent in building the relationship between the preceding and the following text, ensuring the coherence in discourse. On the contrary, machine translation does not present the relationship between the theory and the action and only uses the conjunction “and” to show the causality relation, decreasing the accuracy and the coherence of this translated section.

E.g. 9

ST: “以史为鉴、开创未来...”

新的征程上...”

TT1 : To take history as a mirror and open up the future, we must...

On the new journey, we must...

TT2 : As we put conscious effort into learning from history to create a bright future, we must bear the following in mind:

We must...

On the journey ahead...

In source text, “以史为鉴, 开创未来” and “新的征程上...” appear in front of every two paragraphs. Choosing these two sentences as the beginning of every two paragraphs can perfectly present the coordination relation between paragraphs, making the context more organized and coherent. Nevertheless, the machine does not ensure that the beginning of every two paragraphs use

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the same pattern, that is to say, every parallel paragraph has some slight differences with others, destroying the coordination relation and the coherence in the context. Compared to the machine, translators add a summary to correspond to the source text which highlights the core content of the article, and also ensure that every two paragraphs begin with the sentences "We must..." and "On the journey ahead...", making the whole context more logical and orderly. We could conclude that human translation followed the Fidelity rule better.

### 3.4 Differences in Rhetorical Devices

Besides considering lexical, syntactical, and contextual levels, a great translation also needs to concern rhetoric since a good translation can create aesthetic feelings. Although both translation versions use some beautiful expressions, human translation undoubtedly has a more vivid and flexible wording.

E.g. 10

ST:谁妄想这样干, 必将在 14 亿多中国人民用血肉筑成的钢铁长城面前碰得头破血流!

TT1: Anyone who thinks of doing so will surely face the Great Wall of steel built with the flesh and blood of more than 1.4 billion Chinese people.

TT2: Anyone who would attempt to do so will find themselves on a collision course with a great wall of steel forged by over 1.4 billion Chinese people.

The source text's phrase is filled with many cultural terms that reflect Chinese language idioms and is quite emotive. In human translation, it uses the term "on a collision course" to establish a basic scenario to express the serious consequence of the above action with artistic beauty while preserving and adhering to the skopos rule, which is the fundamental goal of translation, whereas machine translation only uses the words "surely face", which reduces the grandeur and language beauty of the original text.

E.g. 11

ST: "推动历史车轮向着光明的目标前进"

TT1: ...push the wheel of history toward a bright goal.

TT2: ...strive to keep the wheels of history rolling toward bright horizons.

In this example, the translator uses metaphors, judging "history" as "the wheels" and "goals" as "horizons". In the original work, "history" is analogized with "the wheels" so the translator not only retains this beautiful metaphor but also replaces the original word "goals" with a new image "horizons" to adapt to the imagery in the previous text, showing the reader the beauty of language. So as we can see, it changes the words used in the original reasonably to present a better aesthetic effect. On the contrary, the machine sticks too precisely to the original words and forms, which makes its translation a bit monotonous.

At the same time, translators also focus on using different forms of sentences to make the translation aesthetic and orderly.

E.g. 12

ST: "回首过去, 展望未来"

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TT1: Looking back on the past and looking forward to the future...

TT2: Looking back on the path we have traveled and forward to the journey that lies ahead.

“The path we have traveled” and “the journey that lies ahead” are symbols of “the past” and “the future” respectively, that is to say, the translator substitutes the abstract things for the concretized forms by using a metonymic rhetorical device, which makes the text more vivid and attractive.

In terms of rhetoric, the translator shows us its irreplaceable advantage. To increase the literariness of the translation, the text in human translation is filled with beautiful words, orderly structures, and aesthetic rhetoric, showing readers a sense of beauty. This advantage actually can create a literary atmosphere and rouse up readers’ interests, which can eventually be an attractive way to spread the main idea of the whole article and greatly comply with the Skopos rule. On the contrary, the machine which only reserves the original words and sentences, lacks literary beauty. But this feature makes the machine strictly obey the original work, avoiding the mistakes carried by subjective changes, which makes its translation accord with the fidelity rule.

#### IV. Conclusion

Combining our experimental results and some suggestions from professors in translation majors, we find that these two translation methods are not perfect, that is to say, they have some inherent shortages. Machine translation cannot achieve the level of high-quality human translation while human translation lacks the stability and efficiency that machine translation has. However, if we find a reasonable way to combine two translation methods, the two can complement each other and fix their flaws. That is why this research focuses on the differences between the two methods and explores a new development mode for both of them.

After overall analysis and continuous consideration, we conclude that different literary styles need to adopt different methods. For non-literary texts, machine translation, which is effective in highly professional texts, can perform initial translation while human translation is responsible for auditing. In this way, we can produce translations with both high efficiency and high quality to meet the needs of the current market. For literary texts, which are filled with strong feelings and deep themes, human translation is still used as a main approach while machine translation is used as a supplement, which can ensure the restoration of the original work and the expression of artistic beauty.

Facing the rapid development of technology and the constant changes in situations, what we need to do in the future is to combine machine translation and human translation to fully leverage the advantages of both. Translators not only need to improve their translation levels but also recognize and utilize the benefits of machine translation in terms of time and cost. In that way, these two translation methods can be integrated deeply and jointly promote the progress of the translation cause.

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