

# Translational Strategies of Children's Literature from the Perspective of Skopos Theory: A Case Study of Chinese Version of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*

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**Abstract:** Children are the future of a country. No matter in which country, children's literature plays a very important role. Excellent children's literature helps to correctly shape children's outlook on world, life, and value, giving children a good education and a happy and meaningful childhood. However, a good children's literature can cross national boundaries and circulate in the world. In this case, translation serves as a conduit for the propagation of this type of literature. From the perspective of Skopos theory, this paper takes Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* as an example to explore of children's literature's various translation strategies like domestication and foreignization. Through this research, this thesis will explore translational strategies of children's literature under the instruction of the Skopos theory, further promoting the development of translational theories and practices.

**Keywords:** Skopos Theory, Translational Strategies, Domestication, Foreignization, Children's Literature.

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## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. Research Background

Children's literature plays an important role in the modern literary system. It can help to shape children's outlook on the world, life, and values, giving children a happy and healthy childhood. Children's literature should be something for children to enjoy, not just an adult pedagogic tool[3]. A good children's literature work can cross national boundaries, spreading to many other countries. Thus, when target readers are children, the translator should try to find all special linguistic phenomena in the source text and use them in the translational version[12]. However, due to the different languages and cultures of different countries, the process of spreading excellent children's literature works becomes difficult. When translating for children, the translator should maintain the style and rhetoric of the original text whenever they are available for the purpose of children's literature translation[8]. To solve this problem, people search for more translational strategies to make the translational version better and more fluent. But it is not easy to explore more translational strategies, so people turn to put forward many translational theories like Skopos theory, functional equivalence theory, and "faithfulness, expressiveness and elegance", etc. Translation is a combination of human rational thinking and irrational thinking[10]. This paper is going to search for translational strategies from the perspective of Skopos theory. A translational action is governed by its purpose[4]. Skopos theory was first raised by Katharina Reiss in 1971. And Hans Vermeer did deep research on this theory, making a great contribution to its development. Hans Vermeer emphasized that the Skopos theory contains three rules, including the Skopos Rule, Coherence Rule, and Fidelity Rule in his book *Framework for a General Translation Theory* in 1978. Skopos theory, a theory in the field in translation studies, employs the prime principle of a purposeful action that determines a translation strategy.

### 1.2. Research Significance and Purpose

In Children's literature, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* is always regarded as a popular and meaningful one. Its unique fantastic story and rich language style make it an international favorite. Notably, children are generally focused on the fascinating plot of a story and will get bored or have no patience to continue reading if the plot develops at a low pace[13]. When translating such a classic work of children's literature, translators face many challenges, especially considering how to convey the emotional, humorous, and educational nature of the original work in the target culture.

Translation is a discourse produced in the context of the target language for a specific purpose and target audience[5]. The perspective of Skopos theory emphasizes that the purpose or function of translation is central to knowing the translation strategy. In children's literature translation, consideration of the reader's age, culture, and receptiveness is essential to ensure the success of the translation. Therefore, based on the perspective of Skopos theory, this study aims to explore the translation strategy of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* from English to Chinese, to understanding how to effectively convey information to children readers in the target culture.

By studying the Chinese version of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, we can conduct a fresh empirical investigation into Skopos theory within the domain of translating children's literature, contributing to the further development of Skopos theory in literary translation. Understanding the specific strategies in the translation process can help translators better cope with the cultural differences, humorous elements, and educational nature of literary works.

Therefore, the purpose and significance of this study are to provide theoretical deepening and practical guidance for the field of children's literature translation. Through the analysis of the Chinese translation of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, this study reveals the strategies of Skopos theory in children's literature translation and provides a beneficial exploration for the further development of translation theory and practice.

## 2. Literature Review

The thesis makes a research on translation strategies from the perspective of Skopos Theory based on the translation of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. Therefore, it is essential to have a review of the theory, the novel, and the translation version of the novel. And Skopos theory has been applied by increasing foreign and domestic researchers to study children's literature translation[7].

Studies on Skopos Theory at Home and Abroad

In foreign countries, the research in the field of children's literature translation is more in-depth, and the perspective of Skopos theory also plays an important role.

Some foreign studies have explored the application of Skopos theory in children's literature translation more systematically. Through case studies, researchers have explored how to effectively convey original children's literature works in the target culture during the actual translation process.

Foreign studies have emphasized the importance of acculturation in children's literature translation. Utilizing thorough investigation and empirical inquiry, scholars delve into the intricacies of harmonizing the cultural nuances inherent in the source text with the imperative to tailor it effectively for the target culture.

In China, research in the field of children's literature translation has received more and more attention, especially the translation strategies for classic children's literature. Skopos theory, as a translation theory, has also been widely used in translation studies in China in recent years.

Some scholars have begun to apply Skopos theory to the translation of children's literature, exploring how the purpose of translation affects the selection of translation strategies. These studies have focused on practical applications of Skopos theory in addressing cultural differences, language differences, and readers receptivity.

Translations for children's literature are also in the works. Some scholars are concerned about the treatment of cultural elements in children's literature in the translation process, and how to ensure that the translated version still has the educational and emotional appeal of the original in the target culture.

Some studies focus on the practical experience of translating children's literature. Researchers use case studies or translation practices to summarize some common strategies used in translating children's literature, in which the perspective of Skopos theory is gradually introduced into the discussion.

Vermeer first proposed Skopos Theory in his Framework for a General Translation Theory (1978), an academic paper that is the founding document of Skopos theory. In 1984, Vermeer and his teacher Reiss co-authored the first part of the book *Foundation of General Translation Theory*, which introduced Vermeer's Skopos theory in detail and is an important document for the study of Skopos theory. They believed that translation is not only a linguistic process, but should be regarded as the activity of transferring the linguistic and non-verbal communication conformity from one language to another.

We used keywords like Skopos theory, translational strategies, children's literature, and *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* to retrieve in a relational database, screening out English journal articles in the past five years and paying more attention to translational strategies in children's literature. The

existing literature is divided into the following themes: The examination encompasses a detailed analysis of the diverse translational strategies employed in the translation of children's literature, the application of Skopos theory within this specific context, and the compilation of linguistic data pertaining to *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*.

The result of the research shows that from the perspective of Skopos theory, people can discuss and explore more translational strategies to improve the translation of children's literature.

The specific application of Skopos theory can conclude readers' positioning, cultural shift, language shift, emotional conveyance, and the maintenance of literary style.

At first, translators must have an understanding of the target reader group, including their age, cultural background, and reading level. It is imperative for them to ascertain the overarching style and strategic approach based on an in-depth understanding of the characteristics of the intended audience and the objectives of the translation endeavor.

In children's literature translation, the shift of cultural elements is extremely significant. According to Skopos theory, the translator must transform the cultural elements in the original text based on the cultural background of the target readers, making it easier to be understood and received by readers. These cultural elements include customs, festivals, and traditional stories.

Skopos theory emphasizes the goal and result of the translation. Therefore, translators need to use translation skills flexibly based on the features and readers' habits of the target language, to make translation more suitable to the target reader's habits, which might relate to the choice of words, the adjustment of sentence structure, etc.

Children's literature works often contain colorful emotional elements like friendship, love, and growth. In the process of translation, translators have to convey the emotions and feelings of the original text and ensure target readers can understand and feel them, making the translation more infectious and closer.

Although target readers' needs are very important, it is still more important to respect the literary style and features of the original text. Therefore, when translating children's literature, translators must use translational skills flexibly to make the translational version fit target readers' reading habits and retain the literary charm of the original text.

## 3. Theoretical Framework

Skopos theory is a theory about translation that has a clear process of development and theoretical framework. In practice, the term "Skopos" is explained as the purpose of the target text in most cases[1]. This chapter will explain Skopos theory in detail.

### 3.1. Three Rules of Skopos Theory

#### 3.1.1. Skopos Rule

The skopos rule is the key rule of the Skopos theory, which emphasizes the purpose and function of the translation. Skopos theory posits that translation goes beyond a straightforward process of rendering the original text into the target language, suggesting that it involves a more intricate and nuanced approach. Translators are tasked with navigating complexities beyond mere linguistic conversion, considering factors like the intended purpose of the translation, the audience it is meant to reach, and the cultural context surrounding the source text. It believes that the purpose of

translation is decided based on a specific translation task or context. The act of translation is not just a transformation of language, but a process toward a specific goal. This goal can be various like satisfying readers' requirements, conveying specific information, or adapting to a specific cultural background.

Under the instruction of the Skopos rule, the translator must first determine the purpose and future effect of the translation task. To achieve this goal, the translator has to analyze the original text, and understanding readers' intentions and requirements. Then the translator can decide to choose what translational strategies and means. For example, in commercial translation, the purpose of translation might be conveying accurate business information, thus the translator should choose an explicit and precise way of expression, while in literary translation, the goal of translation might be to convey the emotion and style of the original text, so the translator may pay more attention to retaining the literary style and emotion.

### 3.1.2. Coherence Rule

In Skopos theory, the coherence rule is an important rule, which emphasizes the coherence and consistency of linguistic structure and semantic meaning. The coherence rule insists that the translation version must be consistent in language and logic with the original text, making the target text convey the information naturally and fluently.

### 3.1.3. Fidelity Rule

The fidelity rule is an important rule that stresses that translation should be as loyal to the connotation and purpose of the source text as possible. Loyalty is not the old "fidelity" in new clothes, because fidelity usually refers to an intertextual relationship between the source and the target texts as linguistic entities[2]. According to the fidelity rule, there exists a widely held belief that the primary responsibility of the translator extends beyond a mere linguistic exchange, emphasizing instead the imperative to faithfully transmit both the information and nuanced meaning encapsulated within the original text, rather than resorting to mere linguistic conversion or substitution. It means that the translator should respect and follow the style, language feature, and purpose of the source text, trying his or her best to pass on the meaning and feeling of the original. Whether it is Chinese culture going global or multi-cultural exchange, it is necessary to make the translation of children's literature more systematic and comprehensive[9].

## 4. Translation Strategies Studies on the Translational version of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* from the Perspective of Skopos Theory

### 4.1. Translation Strategies

There are two types of translational strategies: foreignization and domestication[11].

#### 4.1.1. Domestication

Domestication lays an emphasis on making the content of the original text and cultural elements fit to the habits and cultural background of target readers, to improve the comprehensibility and affinity of the translation. In domestication, the translator tends to adjust the cultural details and sentence structures. The main advantage of domestication is making the translation more acceptable and understandable. In addition, domestication helps to promote

cross-cultural communication, making communication among different cultures more fluent. For instance, in the process of translation, the translator might make an adjustment to the name of a place and people according to readers' reading habits and cultural background.

#### 4.1.2. Foreignization

Foreignization pays more attention to retaining features of the source text, especially language form and cultural connotation, to a certain degree leaving some language style and cultural characteristics of the source language. This kind of strategy emphasizes respecting and reserving original culture and showing differences by retaining heterogeneity of the source text. Moreover, foreignization is beneficial to enhance readers' understanding and feeling of the original text, promoting intercultural communication. For example, in the process of translation, the translator may retain some specific words, sentence patterns, and cultural habits, giving them fewer adjustments or alternations. This kind of translation strategy can better display the style and features of the original, giving the translation the same charm and temperament as the original.

No matter in what situation, the translator should apply these two types of translation strategies flexibly based on concrete textual characteristics and the purpose of the translation, to achieve as good a translation as possible.

## 4.2. Translation Strategies Used in the Translational Version of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*

*Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* is a popular book about children's literature all over the world. Many famous translators tried to translate it into their target languages. In order to achieve their goal, they need to conduct research on different translational theories and translational strategies and skills. In the framework of translational theory, the translation can be arranged more organizational and explicitly. Now, the thesis is going to make an analysis of translational strategies used in this book under the instruction of Skopos theory.

(1) "Hold your tongue, Ma!" said the young Crab, a little snappishly. "You're enough to try the patience of an oyster!"  
"妈，闭嘴！"年轻的螃蟹有点儿心情烦躁的说道，"你真可以挑战一只牡蛎的耐心了！"[6]

In this example, Wu Juntao used "牡蛎" to explain the meaning of "oyster". In fact, Chinese people may call this "生蚝" or "蛤蜊". In Zhao Yuanren's translational version, he used "蛤蜊" to replace the meaning of "oyster". Mr. Wu's translation style is loyalty and accuracy. To ensure the high quality of the translation and convey the precise meaning of the source text, foreignization is his best choice under the instruction of the fidelity rule. In this example, Wu chose literal translation. And "Hold your tongue" was translated into "闭嘴". Moreover, the expressional way and emotional color of the original text were emphasized, reflecting foreignization.

(2) "It was much pleasanter at home," thought poor Alice, "when one wasn't always growing larger and smaller, and being ordered about by mice and rabbits..."

"待在家里，我可是愉快的多，"可怜的爱丽斯想道，"那会儿，咱们并不是一会儿长大，一会儿缩小，也并未被老鼠和兔子差来差去的....."[6]

In Skopos theory, the coherence rule requires the translation to be fluent and accurate, while the skopos rule emphasizes that the translation should obey the purpose of the

translational act and the translator. In this section, Mr. Wu replaced “being ordered about by mice and rabbits” with “被老鼠和兔子差来差去”. The phrase “差来差去” is full of features of the Chinese language and to some extent old-school. And the phrase “growing larger and smaller” was translated into “一会儿长大，一会儿缩小”，which described the change Alice experienced in the fantasy world more directly. In addition, the translation also used some modifiers and linking words like “可怜的爱丽斯想道” and “那会儿”，making it more coherent, natural and fluent. Domestication refers to translating the expressional way of the source text into a common way of expression of the target language. So, in this example, Wu chose domestication, transferring the metaphor and humor into a more direct expression to fit to target readers’ reading habits and language style.

(3) Alice was beginning to get very tired of sitting by her sister on the bank, and of having nothing to do.

爱丽斯挨着她的姐姐坐在河边，由于无事可干，开始觉得没劲。[6]

The adjective word “tired” is such a common word that many people might neglect it. However, Wu noticed this simple word and translated it into “没劲”. The phrase “没劲” in English may mean having no strength. But in Chinese, it means boring, uninteresting, or humdrum. The word “没劲” is more appropriate to ordinary people’s daily oral habits. What is more, the phrase “sitting by her sister on the bank, and of having nothing to do” was translated into “挨着她的姐姐坐在河边，由于无事可干”. Wu added more descriptions about details while retaining the basic meaning of the source text, making the circumstance more specific and vivid. In this way, readers can resonate more easily. In order to make the translation full of Chinese characteristics and more understandable, Wu used the strategy of domestication, expressing the meaning of the original in a more direct and common way. In this way, the translation becomes more popular and easier to understand.

(4) However this bottle was not marked poison, so Alice ventured to taste it, and, finding it very nice (it had, in fact, a sort of mixed flavor or cherry-tart, custard, pie-apple, roast turkey, toffy, and hot buttered toast), she very soon finished it off.

不过不管怎么说，这个瓶子没有标明“毒品”，所以爱丽斯斗胆尝了一口，并且发现味道挺不错，（事实上，瓶子里的东西含有一种樱桃馅饼、牛乳蛋糕、菠萝、烤火鸡、太妃糖、以及热奶油烤面包片一起混合起来的风味。）于是她咕嘟咕嘟一下子全喝光了。[6]

In this long sentence, there are many nouns like cherry-tart, custard, pie-apple, roast turkey, toffy, and hot buttered toast, which are foreign foods. Mr. Wu translated them literally using words like “樱桃馅饼”，“牛乳蛋糕”，“烤火鸡”，“太妃糖”，and “热奶油烤面包片”. These things are all from abroad. Keeping them can help to retain the exotic style and broaden children readers’ horizons. To make the translation more understandable, Mr. Wu used parenthesis to explain some details in the original, which makes readers feel personally on the scene. To summarize, while retaining the cultural features and details of the original text as much as possible, this translation helps readers better understand it through some auxiliary explanations and literal translations. So, in this example, Mr. Wu used foreignization.

(5) After a time she heard a little pattering of feet in the distance, and she hastily dried her eyes to see what was

coming.

一会儿之后，她听见远处传来一阵小小的脚步声，啪嗒啪嗒响，她赶紧擦干眼泪，看看是谁来了。[6]

The phrase “a little pattering of feet” is onomatopoeic, having no Chinese meaning. Thus, for the sake of substituting this word with a Chinese word, Mr. Wu used “啪嗒啪嗒”，a word simulating the sounds of steps. In addition, Mr. Wu translated “hastily” into “赶紧” to fit the Chinese context. This is a kind of domestication. In this translation, the skopos rule may be a dominant factor.

But she went on all the same, shedding gallons of tears, until there was a large pool all round her, about four inches deep and reaching half down the hall.

可是她仍然哭个不停，一加仑一加仑(1加仑=4.54609升)的眼泪从眼中流出来，直弄得她的四周变成了一个大水池子，约有四英尺深，漫掉了半个厅堂。[6]

In this example, Mr. Wu used Foreignization. The word “gallon” and the word “inch” were respectively transliterated into “加仑” and “英尺”. Because “gallon” and “inch” are all the units of measurement from abroad, they may be strange to Chinese readers. The word “inch” may be common to some extent, but the word “gallon” must be not familiar to most of Chinese. So, in this translation, Wu added a note to explain the word “gallon”. In this way, the translation can not only retain the style of the original, but also convey its exact meaning. Readers’ horizons can also be broadened.

(7) .....When suddenly a white rabbit with pink eyes ran close by her. There was nothing so very remarkable in that; nor did Alice think it so very much out of the way to hear the Rabbit say to itself, “Oh dear! Oh dear! I shall be too late!”

.....这时候，突然有一只粉红眼睛的大白兔跑到她的跟前来。这件事并不令人惊讶；爱丽丝听见大白兔自言自语地说：“哦，天哪！哦，天哪！我要迟到啦！”她也不觉得很奇怪。[6]

In this translation, Wu applied the translational strategy foreignization. The phrase “a white rabbit with pink eyes” was translated into “粉红眼睛的大白兔”，and “Oh dear” was translated into “哦，天哪！”. The sentence pattern and the linguistic structure was generally retained with a little bit of translationese. In this way, readers can better feel the exotic style and emotion of characters. However, this kind of way may to some extent not fit readers’ reading habits.

There might be advantages and disadvantages in both translational strategies. Foreignization can keep the exotic style and linguistic features of the source text, but it may not fit target readers’ reading habits and needs more explanations, while domestication can make the translation more acceptable and understandable, but it will lose some features and information of the original text. These two strategies should be applied according to the context, optimizing the translation.

## 5. Conclusion

Skopos theory is a kind of translational theory, that stressing the target and target readers in the process of translation. It believes that translation should adjust the original based on the language and cultural habits of the target culture to better convey the meaning and effect of the source text.

Domestication and foreignization are two types of translation strategies that are used to cope with differences in culture between the source and the target language. Domestication tends to add more cultural habits and customs

to the translation so that it can be more acceptable and understandable to target readers. Foreignization refers to retaining as many cultural features and styles of the original text as possible, making the translation more loyal to the source text.

*Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* is full of surprising elements and cultural metaphors, so, the translator might face the challenge of how to deal with these features.

If using domestication, translators might transform some cultural details into forms which is more comprehensible, and guarantee that the story is coherent and down-to-earth. If applying to foreignization, the translator may pay more attention to keeping cultural features and strangeness of the source text, giving readers the unique charm and style of the source language text.

In conclusion, the translator should be in consideration of Skopos theory and its three rules when translating *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. The translator should also apply domestication and foreignization flexibly to both convey the meaning and satisfy readers' requirements when dealing with cultural differences.

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