

A Study on Chinese-Japanese Mutual Translation Strategies for Multiple Text Types From a Functionalist Perspective

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Based on Katharina Reiss's text typology theory from the German Functionalist School, this paper systematically explores the strategic differences and practical methods in the mutual translation between Chinese and Japanese for operative, informative, expressive, and informative + expressive text types. By comparatively analyzing the linguistic functions, communicative features, and cultural cognitive differences of these four text types, the study proposes targeted translation strategies: Operative texts require tone adjustment, localized adaptation, and pragmatic compensation to maximize appeal; informative texts emphasize sentence structure restructuring and terminology standardization to ensure information transfer efficiency; expressive texts focus on formal imitation and rhetorical reproduction to preserve the original aesthetic value; for informative + expressive texts, flexible handling of idioms, proverbs, and stylistic forms is necessary to achieve an optimal balance between informational accuracy and aesthetic form. The study validates the applicability of functionalist theory in Chinese-Japanese translation through empirical case studies, while also revealing the prevalence of mixed text functions and the consequent demand for translator strategic flexibility. These findings not only expand the explanatory dimension of Reiss's theory, but also provide an operational methodological framework for cross-cultural translation practice, holding practical significance for promoting in-depth communication between China and Japan.

Keywords: Chinese-Japanese mutual translation, text typology theory, translation strategies

Introduction

Katharina Reiss, a representative figure of the German Functionalist School, linked the three functions of language with corresponding language characteristics, text types, and communicative situations, primarily categorizing texts into informative (representing objects and facts), expressive (expressing emotions and attitudes), and operative (influencing the text receiver). She proposed corresponding translation methods for different types.

This theory provides an important classification basis for translation practice. However, texts in reality often possess multiple functions simultaneously, especially in Chinese-Japanese translation, where cultural differences and the complexity of language expression habits make it difficult to apply single-type translation strategies entirely.

Therefore, within the framework of Reiss's theory and combined with practical cases of Chinese-Japanese translation, this study explores the translation strategies for operative, informative, expressive, and informative

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+ expressive texts. By analyzing the differences in linguistic function, communicative norms, and cultural cognition among different text types, this study aims to supplement the applicability of Reiss's theory and provide translators with more operational methodological guidance.

Table 1

Functions, Characteristics, and Corresponding Translation Methods for Different Text Types (Cited From Munday, 2014, p. 107)

Text type	Informative	Expressive	Operative
Language function	Representing objects and facts	Expressing sender's attitude	Making an appeal to text receiver
Language characteristic	Logical	Aesthetic	Dialogic
Text focus	Content-focused	Form-focused	Appellative-focused
TT should	Transmit referential content	Transmit aesthetic form	Elicit desired response
Translation method	"Plain prose", explication as required	"Identifying" method, adopt perspective	"Adaptive", equivalent effect

Operative Texts

The purpose of translating an operative text is to elicit an intended response. Regarding its translation method, Reiss suggests adopting an "adaptive" method to achieve equivalent effect. Adaptation refers to using a particularly free approach in translation, meaning that to make the target text more suitable for target language readers, the translator can, to some extent, change the content and form of the source text. So, how exactly should these changes be made?

ST1: 电子文档提交邮箱xxxx.com, 如有实物快递, 请通过邮箱、电话或微信联系具体收件方式。(From the translation practice of a competition notice)

TT: 電子文書の場合、メールアドレスxxxx.comにお送りください。実物の宅配をご利用の場合、メールアドレス、電話、ウィーチャットにて受け取り方法をご連絡ください。

ST2: 为相关作品推荐指导老师或合作伙伴, 以帮助完善内容, 参与其他赛事、开展课题研究或产品开发等。(Same as above)

TT: さらに関連する作品に指導教師や協力パートナーを紹介して作品の完成度を高める一助とし、他のコンクールに参加したり、課題研究に取り組んだり、製品を開発したりする際のお力添えをいたします。

Chinese competition notices and similar texts are generally concise, focusing on describing objective rules or procedures such as competition requirements and how to apply. Even if the content includes lively interactive elements, the main tone remains solemn and formal. Therefore, when translating into Japanese, it is necessary to fully reflect this stylistic formality. For instance, the Chinese original in Example (1) uses only one "请" (please) to express respect, whereas the corresponding Japanese translation uses honorific and formal expressions in multiple places. Similarly, the translation in Example (2) uses humble expressions. That is, translation needs to consider the communicative norms or habits of the target language. In Japanese, when interacting in formal settings, honorifics (尊敬語 "sonkeigo") and humble language (謙譲語 "kenjōgo") are frequently used to express respect and formality. Furthermore, since these are operative texts appealing for active submission of entries, their essence involves interaction with people; naturally, honorific expressions become indispensable. Otherwise, the Japanese target audience might perceive the organizer as lacking respect and sincerity, preventing the text from fully exerting its persuasive and appealing power.

ST3: あなたも日本共産党に入って、自分の幸せと、社会進歩を重ね合わせる生き方を選び取っていただきたい。あなたの入党を心からよびかけます。(From the translation practice of a proposal)

TT1: 希望你也加入日本共产党, 选择让自己的幸福和社会进步融为一体的生活方式。真诚地邀请你入党。

TT2: 我们希望你也能够加入日本共产党, 选择一个将个人幸福与社会进步融为一体的人生。我们诚挚地邀请你入党!

A literal translation of the ST3 yields TT1, but it is difficult to perceive the emotional factors beyond the words, failing to fully convey the persuasive appeal of the original. TT2, based on grasping the sentence semantics and expressive purpose, uses amplification by adding the agent “我们” (we), significantly enhancing the persuasive force. Secondly, changing “生活方式” (lifestyle) to “人生” (life) expands the conceptual category (“lifestyle” is part of “life”), thereby broadening the target audience’s cognitive space regarding “joining the Communist Party”, further highlighting the significant impact of this choice on people, and thus reflecting its grandeur and sanctity, achieving the translation goal of fully influencing the target reader. Additionally, Japanese texts rarely use exclamation marks, even in highly agitative or inflammatory texts. Unlike Japanese, Chinese often uses exclamation marks to express passionate emotions. For example, the calm statement “あなたの入党を心からよびかけます” becomes “我们诚挚地邀请你入党!” (We sincerely invite you to join the Party!), instantly conveying a sense of firm belief and power, which is inspiring. This is precisely because TT2 better aligns with this characteristic of Chinese, meeting the communicative norms of the target language.

ST4: 日本共産党の提言が、それをすすめるうえでのささやかな一石となることを心から願って、私の講演を終わります。(From the translation practice of a speech)

TT1: 衷心希望日本共产党的建议能为推动这一事业发展添砖加瓦。我的演讲就此结束。

TT2: 最后, 衷心希望日本共产党的建议能或多或少地对推动该事业的发展产生积极影响, 发挥积极作用。我的演讲到此结束, 谢谢大家!

First, the phrase “ささやかな一石” in the original is clearly a metaphorical expression, but it only contains the noun “small stone” without a corresponding verbal predicate, making the semantic frame unclear. Consequently, Chinese readers cannot easily grasp the precise meaning intended here. Generally, Chinese readers seeing “石” (stone 最容易联想到其作为建筑材料的功能 (most easily associate its function as a building material)), i.e., the framework of a building, hence translated as “添砖加瓦” (add bricks and tiles) in TT1. However, in Japanese, there is the idiom “一石を投じる” (isseki o tōjiru—to cast a stone), meaning “to cause a stir; to bring about some impact”, where “一石” refers to “a factor that triggers an influence”. Thus, “ささやかな一石” refers to “a slight factor”. Therefore, considering the preceding context, it can first be tentatively translated as “能做出小小的贡献” (can make a small contribution), then enriched and refined to become “能或多或少地对推动该事业的发展产生积极影响, 发挥积极作用” (can more or less positively influence and play a positive role in promoting the development of this cause).

Secondly, the original is the conclusion of a speech. According to Chinese expression habits, the final sentence of a speech often starts with “最后” (finally) and adds an expression like “谢谢大家!” (Thank you, everyone!) after “我的演讲到此结束” (That concludes my speech). Although a minor point, this makes the target language text sound smoother and more natural to the reader, enhancing its acceptability.

Summary

Notifications and invitations to join organizations, though differing in the intensity of tone, ultimately belong to persuasive, appealing operative texts. The most crucial aspect of operative texts is to make the target reader, upon understanding the semantics, resonate emotionally with the translator and develop empathy. Analyzing the specific cases above, combined with the different characteristics of Chinese and Japanese languages, indicates

that a domesticating approach should be the translation principle. This involves adjusting tone through “amplification/omission” and “rational use of punctuation” at the linguistic form level to ensure the translation conforms to target language expression habits and audience acceptance.

Here, the domesticating approach means aligning with the common expressions and habitual wording of the target language in the corresponding context, achieving a vivid and natural free translation that the target audience readily accepts. When adjusting tone, noting that when translating direct imperative sentences expressing requests, invitations, or persuasion in Chinese operative texts into Japanese, it is necessary to explicitate respect and formality without excessively weakening the appealing and persuasive force. This requires using honorific expressions to make the sentence tone peaceful and indirect. Conversely, when translating sentences containing honorifics in Japanese operative texts into Chinese, it is necessary to simplify the honorific expressions by using words like “请” (Please) and “您” (You [honorific]) at the lexical level, and syntactic structures like “是否可以……” (Would it be possible to...) or “如果……, 我们将不胜荣幸” (If..., we would be greatly honored) to avoid excessive respect leading to wordy and cumbersome expressions. That is, the Chinese translation of operative texts, especially those similar to competition notices and public invitations or persuasions, must conform to the concise and formal expression habits of Chinese.

Furthermore, the author consistently advocates that translation work requires the participation of native speakers, especially for Chinese-to-foreign language translation. As with the term “一石” in the example, understanding the same vocabulary can lead to different semantic outcomes due to different construed semantic frames. In such cases, one must avoid subjective assumptions; instead, it is necessary to conduct searches and verification, consulting and confirming with native Japanese speakers when necessary.

Informative Texts

The purpose of translating an informative text is to transmit the referential content of the source text. Regarding its translation method, Reiss suggests using plain, simple language to produce a concise translation free of redundancy. However, relying solely on this is clearly insufficient.

ST5: 子どもだけで使わない、乳幼児の手が届くところで使用しない。やけど・感電・けがのおそれ。

(From the translation practice of a user manual)

TT1: 不要让儿童单独使用, 不要在婴幼儿可触碰到的地方使用。可能会造成烫伤、触电、受伤。

TT2: 不要让儿童单独使用, 使用时应避免婴幼儿触碰, 以免造成烫伤、触电或其他伤害。

TT1 almost achieves a word-for-word correspondence with the original; the information is complete and accurate. According to the existing translation strategy for informative texts, this fully meets the standard and theoretical requirements. However, it is not difficult to notice that the underlined parts in TT1 still feel unnatural because they do not conform to the linguistic characteristics and expression habits of the target language, Chinese. Consulting similar product instruction manuals in Chinese reveals that warning language in Chinese manuals often adopts the fixed pattern “不要(禁止)……, 以免(以防)……” (Do not [prohibit]..., to avoid [to prevent]...). This helps the sentence avoid redundancy and appear smoother. Therefore, changing the stiff literal translation “不要在婴幼儿可触碰到的地方使用” (Do not use within reach of infants and young children) to “使用时应避免婴幼儿触碰, 以免……” (During use, avoid contact by infants and young children to prevent...) makes the translation smoother and more natural. Additionally, the term “受伤” (injured) belongs to a superordinate category encompassing specific injuries like “烫伤” (scalds) and “触电” (electric shock). Nouns from different

categorical levels are not suitable for “并列表达” (coordinated expression). Therefore, changing “けが” (injury) to “其他伤害” (other injuries) and connecting it with “或” (or) makes the translation coherent and natural.

ST6: [炊飯 | 無洗米] キー・[取消] キーの中央の凸部は、目の不自由な方に配慮したものです。(Same as above)

TT1: [煮饭|免洗米]键、[取消]键的中央突起部位是专门为眼睛不方便的人士所设计的。

TT2: [煮饭|免洗米]键、[取消]键的中央突起部位是专门为视障人士所设计的。

TT1 renders “目の不自由な方” as “眼睛不方便的人士” (people with inconvenient eyesight), which is a literal translation, tends to be colloquial, lacks professionalism, and although it accurately conveys “limited eye function” semantically, it does not conform to Chinese expression habits. “视障人士” (visually impaired individuals) in TT2 is a commonly used professional term in Chinese, aligns with target language expression habits, achieves concise, accurate, and professional expression, and better fulfills the core function of informative texts.

ST7: 農業生産も、専門的な農業者だけでなく半農半X、定年帰農、体験農業、NPO法人など多様な人びとで担われるようになっている。(From the translation practice of a policy proposal)

TT1: 农业生产的承担者已经不仅仅只局限于全职农业经营者了，还可以是半农半X者、退休归农者、农业体验者、NPO法人等各类人群。

TT2: 农业生产的承担者已经不仅仅只局限于全职农业经营者了，还可以是半农半X者、退休归农者、农业体验者、非盈利组织等各类人群。(Footnote: 所谓“半农半X”，就是一方面亲手栽种稻米、蔬菜等农作物，以获取安全的粮食(农)。另一方面从事能够发挥天赋特长的工作，换得固定的收入，并且建立个人和社会的连结(X)。目的是追求一种不再被金钱或时间逼迫，而回归人类本质的平衡生活。)

TT1 literally translates “半農半X” and “NPO法人”, which is not conducive to understanding for Chinese readers, resulting in insufficient semantic transfer. TT2, corresponding to the original meaning, translates “NPO法人” as “非盈利组织” (non-profit organizations), facilitating comprehension for the Chinese audience. Similarly, there is no direct equivalent term in Chinese for the Japanese “半農半X”, but Chinese does have the structure “半……半……” (half... half...). Therefore, while adopting a foreignizing strategy to directly introduce the source language expression into the target language, a footnote is added for explanation. This ensures both conciseness in the translated text and clear transmission of the original information.

Summary

The translation of informative texts requires adopting a domesticating strategy while ensuring accuracy and conciseness, taking into account the expression habits of the target language to make the translation smooth and natural. This is because the inherent differences between Chinese and Japanese in cultural background, thinking patterns, and language expression habits require us not only to correctly convey the semantics (initial translation) but also to transform the initial translation into natural target language at the linguistic form level, i.e., re-examining the initial translation from the perspective of target language thinking. Regarding this, one can search for target language texts identical or similar to the source text, drawing on existing common sentence structures or vocabulary in the target language to optimize the translation expression. Furthermore, in translating informative texts, when a term in the source language lacks a corresponding expression in the target language, it is generally necessary to add annotations, which can be in the form of footnotes or inline notes depending on their length.

Expressive Texts

The purpose of translating an expressive text is to mimic the aesthetic form of the source text. Regarding its translation method, Reiss proposes to identify with the method and adopt the perspective of the ST. Specifically, the ideal translation for an expressive text, while conveying corresponding semantics and ensuring accuracy, should also reflect the formal beauty, rhythmic beauty, and the artistic beauty arising from certain forms and rhythms of the original.

ST8: 在纯水中溶解弥漫, 在旋转中沉淀、沉淀, 在烈火里融化淬炼, 在翻滚中变幻、变幻。(From the translation practice of lyric)

TT1: 純水の中で溶け立ち込め、回転しながら沈殿を続け、炎で融解され焼入れられ、転がりながら変幻を進め。

TT2: 水の中に溶け、混ぜれば沈殿し、火の中で煮えたぎり、姿を変える。

Lyrics and poetry are texts that highly value artistic expression. Each line of the original text rhymes with “an” at the end, and each line has the same number of characters, 8. TT1 is translated following this characteristic: Each line ends with the rhyme “e”, and each line has the same number of characters, 11. This seems to fully comply with the original form but overlooks a crucial point: The core of song translation lies in maintaining the consistency of the melody. In other words, when translating into Japanese, the primary concern is preserving the original melody of the song; secondly, the semantics and emotions the lyrics need to convey; and lastly, considering linguistic aspects like character count and rhyme. Generally, the same melody requires roughly the same number of syllables. Chinese characters are monosyllabic, whereas Japanese requires two or more syllables to form a minimal semantic unit. This means that under the same melody (i.e., the same number of syllables), Chinese can express more semantics than Japanese. Precisely for this reason, when translating Chinese lyrics into Japanese, to keep the Japanese translation consistent with the Chinese original melody, it is necessary to reduce the semantic content expressed in Japanese, i.e., to use omission, selectively translating the original text, thus resulting in TT2. TT2 meets the requirements of the melody but, constrained by semantics, fails to achieve perfect formal rhythm. This is precisely the most challenging aspect of balancing expressive texts. Consequently, in reality, when songs from one country are introduced to others, the lyrics are either amplified or omitted, or directly rewritten significantly, or even only the original melody is imported, abandoning the source language lyrics and writing new lyrics in the target language.

ST9: 法起寺の三重塔、薬師寺の三重塔、法隆寺の五重塔、興福寺の五重塔、宇治川の石塔、般若寺の石塔などなど。私はなかでも、室生寺の石段の上に立っている日本最小の木造五重塔につかまえている。(From the translation practice of prose)

TT1: 法起寺の三重塔、薬師寺の三重塔、法隆寺の五重塔、興福寺の五重塔、宇治川の石塔、般若寺の石塔……
其中，尤为令我着迷的是矗立在室生寺的石阶上的日本最小的木制五重塔。

TT2: 法起寺の三重塔、薬師寺の三重塔、法隆寺の五重塔、興福寺の五重塔、宇治川の石塔、般若寺の石塔……
其中，矗立在室生寺的石阶上的日本最小的木制五重塔最能俘获我心。

The underlined part in the original literally means “I am caught by the wooden five-story pagoda”. Its intended meaning is “I am fascinated by the wooden five-story pagoda”, “the wooden five-story pagoda enchants me”, “my heart is captured by the wooden five-story pagoda”, etc. Ultimately, only one specific expression can be chosen, requiring the translator’s judgment. TT1 uses the word “着迷” (fascinated), which is semantically correct. However, since the original uses personification here, endowing the pagoda with the ability to “catch”

or “capture” people, this expressive form should be preserved in the translation. Therefore, the word “俘获” (capture) in TT2, while conveying the correct semantics of the original, also accommodates the vivid expressive technique of the original, better matching the use of the word “つかまえる” (to catch) in the source text.

Summary

Thus, in translating expressive texts, preserving and imitating the original expressive forms is crucial. For instance, lyrics and poetry emphasize rhyme, sentence arrangement, and rhythmic framework; literary articles also have unique sentence structures and rhythms for expressing emotions. These formal characteristics actually constitute the specific meaning, literariness, and artistry of the original content, making them core elements that cannot be ignored. Therefore, during translation, while ensuring informational accuracy, every effort should be made to align with the original form. Secondly, in translating expressive texts, rhetorical devices such as simile/metaphor, personification, symbolism, metaphor, exaggeration, etc., present in the original should be preserved and imitated as much as possible. These belong to the artistic forms and aesthetic characteristics of the original. Once removed, the readability, literariness, artistry, and aesthetic quality of the text would be greatly diminished.

Informative + Expressive Texts

Informative + expressive text is a very common hybrid text type. However, Reiss does not propose specific translation methods for hybrid texts, only emphasizing that when translating hybrid texts, “the most important factor in judging the TT is whether it conveys the primary function of the ST”. Regarding “informative + expressive texts”, the author believes the difficulty lies in balancing information transmission and style reproduction. Conceptually, these two seem somewhat contradictory, and true understanding can only come from practice.

ST10: 大家都在为证明夏代都城而不懈努力，可是天道酬勤的古训却不能兑现。(From the translation practice of a work in literary anthropology)

TT: 皆は夏王朝の首都の存在を証明するために、弛むことなく努力してきたが、「天道酬勤(努力は必ず報われる)」という古人からの教えが効かなかった。

ST11: 中国古人表达类似的价值观更有一个统一的措辞，叫作“宁为玉碎，不为瓦全”。(Same as above)

TT: 中国古代の人はそれと似た価値観を表す場合に、通用する言葉がある。それは「玉となって砕くとも瓦となって全からじ(名誉を守るために死ぬことはあっても、いたずらに生きながらえるだけのむなしい生涯を送りたくはないということ)」という。

The phrases “天道酬勤” in the first ST and “宁为玉碎，不为瓦全” in the second ST have corresponding translations in Japanese and can be used directly or paraphrased. However, in “informative + expressive” texts, to maintain the literariness and cultural nature of the original, it is necessary to use existing Japanese translations, i.e., directly adopt “天道酬勤” and “玉となって砕くとも瓦となって全からじ”. But most Japanese people cannot understand the meaning of these two proverbs, and since this is an informative text with an academic inclination, to clearly convey the information to readers, inline annotations are also needed in the translation to ensure readers fully comprehend their meanings.

Summary

Regarding the translation of idioms and customary expressions mentioned above, “flexibility” is crucial. In Chinese texts, the use of proverbs, four-character idioms, and other set phrases is relatively frequent. A

certain portion of these have established translations in Japanese. These phrases can be roughly divided into three categories: The first category includes phrases with equivalent form and meaning, e.g., “四面楚歌 (四面楚歌—shi-men-so-ka)”, “不共戴天 (不俱戴天—fu-gu-tai-ten)”. The second category includes phrases with similar form and equivalent meaning, e.g., “敬而远之 (敬遠—kei-en)”, “归心似箭 (帰心矢の如し—kishin ya no gotoshi)”. The third category includes phrases with different form but equivalent meaning, e.g., “马后炮 (後の祭り—ato no matsuri)”, “真人不露相 (能ある鷹は爪を隠す—no aru taka wa tsume o kakusu)” (Gao & Du, 2022, pp. 80-88). During translation, these can be directly used. Although paraphrasing is also possible, to retain the original emotional color, literariness, and cultural nature, it is best to apply them directly. However, it should be noted that some phrases may not be commonly used or well-known among Japanese people; in such cases, inline annotations or footnotes are needed to further explain their meanings, ensuring clear information transmission to the reader. Furthermore, for phrases without established translations in Japanese, paraphrasing or literal translation can be adopted based on text type and personal preference. However, the prerequisite for literal translation is that the original expressive form must be acceptable to the target language reader, and the translated expression can produce the same effect as the original.

Conclusions

Based on Katharina Reiss’s text typology theory and through studying specific translation cases, this paper has preliminarily summarized the translation strategies for Chinese-Japanese mutual translation of operative, informative, expressive, and informative + expressive texts. On the one hand, different text types have their most typical characteristics and tendencies, and their respective translation strategies exhibit significant differences. On the other hand, although Reiss’s text classification provides clear direction for translation, texts in actual translation often possess multiple characteristics and functions simultaneously. Therefore, translators need to integrate various translation strategies based on the theoretical framework, master them thoroughly, adjust strategies according to specific contexts, and make flexible choices.

Through empirical analysis, this study not only validates the applicability of Reiss’s theory in Chinese-Japanese mutual translation but also further expands the translation methods for various text types, providing a more comprehensive reference for translation practice from a functionalist perspective. Future research could incorporate more cross-cultural communication cases to further explore dynamic translation strategies for different text types, promoting the refinement of the theoretical system and the deepening of practical application.

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