Spell Translation in *Harry Potter* From the Perspective of Skopostheorie: A Comparative Analysis on the Versions From Mainland China and Taiwan

ZHOU Wangyue[a],*; ZHUO Yue[a]

[a]School of Foreign Languages, Zhejiang University of Finance & Economics, Hangzhou, China.
* Corresponding author.

Abstract

Magic spells, being very specific in the *Harry Porter* series, become an important part for translation studies. This paper aims to study the spell translation in *Harry Potter* from the perspective of Skopostheorie, a translation theory proposed by Hans Vemeer in the late 1970s. Based on Skopostheorie, this paper gives a comparative analysis of the two versions of spell translations in *Harry Potter* from Mainland China and Taiwan and draws the conclusion that the skopos of spell translation in Mainland China is suitable for all age groups while the skopos of spell translation in Taiwan is children-oriented. Cultural differences in the two areas can partly explain the difference in translations.

Key words: Skopostheorie; Spell translation; *Harry Potter*; Cultural differences

INTRODUCTION

The book series *Harry Potter* enjoy a global popularity in recent years. By now most readers are aware of what has come to be called the Harry Potter phenomenon. The sudden success of the book has resulted in the translations of 67 languages. The book is featured with vivid language and the wonderful magic world it presents. And both children and adults are fascinated by Harry Potter and his unusual stories.

So far, there are two existing Chinese versions— Translation of Taiwan published by Crown Business and translation of Mainland China published by the People's Literature Publishing House. It is universally known that Taiwan literature is one major branch of Chinese literature, and after a few decades' development, there are many differences between Mainland China and Taiwan. The paper will make a comparison between the two versions in reference to the cultural diversity. We can find great differences between the two translations, one of which is the spell translations. The diverse magical spells in *Harry Porte*r have been the great feature of the book. They are concise in spells and become an ideal form of cultural carriers. Usually the spell will consist of 2 to 3 syllables but give a complex effect. So it becomes a challenge for those translators to translate the meaning without damaging the feature of the spell.

In the history of translation studies, for a long time, when people evaluate the quality of a translation, they are likely to use "equivalence" or "faithfulness" to the source text as the most authoritative criterion to judge whether the translation is successful or not. But this kind of translation evaluation is stereotyped and over-simplified. Although this trend plays a positive role in guiding translation practice and standardizing the translation field, other factors should not be neglected either, because translation is a complicated human activity and the study of translation also should be descriptive. A new perspective in translation, the skopostheorie, will be applied to a comparative study of spell translations in *Harry Porter*.

Spell Translation in *Harry Potter* From the Perspective of
Skopostheorie: A Comparative Analysis on the Versions
From Mainland China and Taiwan

1. SKOPOSTHEORIE

Skopostheorie, put forward by Hans J. Vermeer, is the core of the functionalist translation theory developed in Germany in the 1970s. This is a new perspective of viewing translation, which is no longer limited by conventional source-text oriented views. The Skopostheorie, by regarding translation as an action with purpose, tries to open up a new perspective on such aspects as the status of the source text and the target text, their relationship, the conception of translation, the role of the translator, translation standards and strategies. Vermeer finds that, according to action theory, every action has a purpose, and, since translation is an action, it must have a purpose too. The purpose is assigned to every translation through commission (Nord, 2001, p.7).

In Skopostheorie, the viability of the translation brief depends on the circumstances of the target culture, not on the source culture. In Vermeer's terms, the target text should conform to the standards of "intratextual coherence", which means the receiver should be able to understand it; it should make sense in the communicative situation and culture in which it is received (Nord, 2001, p.32).

In a word, there are no such things as right or wrong, faithfulness or unfaithfulness within skopostheorie, and the translation Skopos determines the translation process. Skopostheorie accounts for different strategies in different situations, in which the source text is not the only factor involved.

2. ANALYSIS OF SPELL TRANSLATION IN *HARRY PORTER*

A spell is a set of words, vocally or silently, cast by the user to give some magical effect. According to the history, there were some sorts of magical spells existed in many cultures across the world.

The belief of magical spells used to be popular in ancient Europe and Egypt. And in modern world, the development of science and technology corners the old belief, making it steadily disappear. But there are still groups of people showing interests in the existence of magic world. As a result, a simple novel or film concerning magic is doomed to be popular and among those works, the series of *Harry Potter* are proved to be the most successful ones.

As one of the greatest features in the book *Harry Potter*, the magical spells have their own charms to fascinate readers. They also become the study target of many scholars around the world. Some spells will be studied in the analysis of translation of spells from the perspective of Skopostheorie.

2.1 Magical Spells in *Harry Potter*

J.K Rowling is absolutely a creative and productive author. She creates magical spells in her work *Harry Potter* and all of those spells amazingly vary in forms, sounds as well as effects. First of all we can have an overview of some typical magical spells in Rowling's work.

Table 1
Spells in *Harry Potter*

Spells	Effects
Accio	To call up
Reparo	To Repair
Stupefy	To Stun
Expelliarmus	To Disarm
Silencio	To stop making sound
Avada Kedavra	To Kill
Wingardium Leviosa	To Make things float in the air
Avis	To create birds
Impedimenta	To block
Protego	To protect
Repello Muggletum	To repel margo
Finite Incantatem	To cancel the effect of magic
Obliviate	To clean the memory
Mobiliarbus	To move through space
Aquamenti	To create water

Table 1 shows some typical magic spells in *Harry Potter*. According to these spells, we can easily find one common point that all of the spells are not written in English. This is mainly because English was not the most common language at the time when witchcraft was very popular. J.K Rowling did not pick up English as the spell language in order to give the audience the original taste of the magic as well as convey the meaning of certain magic. She tried to be faithful and respectful to what she meant to tell in her books. Take "Avada Kedavra" for example, "Avada Kedavra" is an ancient spell in Aramaic, and it is the origin of abracadabra which means "let the thing be destroyed". Originally, it was used to cure illness. In *Harry Potter*, Rowling presents this spell with totally different meaning. She decided to make the "thing" as in the person standing in front. It is known to all Harry Porter fans that this spell is the most evil spell in the story.

In spite of Aramaic, Latin is the most common language Rowling used to create magical spells. For instance the spell "Expeliliarmus" has the effect to disarm the enemies. It is purely a Latin word consisting of "Expello", which means to drive off and the word "Arma" which means the weapon or arms. Another example would be "Reparo". This word is similar to the English word "Repair". They just share the same meaning—to fix or mend something.

J.K Rowling also used a few English spells in her works to cultivate a multi-cultural background. According to Table 1, "Stupefy" is an English spell. Rowling chose the original meaning as its effect, that is, to stun the enemy.

We can view from the information above that cultural factors have been involved in the creation of magical spells. Rowling integrates different languages as well as cultures in her books to bring wonders to her audience. On the other hand, this is to add difficulty to translators who are confronted with all these weird spells because they have to make a sound and clear translation to the target audience. This paper will make a careful analysis of the Chinese translations from both Mainland China and Taiwan to study the differences.

2.2 Spell Translation of Mainland China

Table 2
Translations of Mainland China

Spells	Translation of Mainland China
Accio	飞来咒
Reparo	修复如初
Stupefy	混混倒地
Expelliarmus	除你武器
Silencio	无声无息
Avada Kedavra	阿瓦达索命
Wingardium Leviosa	羽加迪姆勒维奥萨
Avis	群鸟飞飞
Impedimenta	障碍重重
Protego	盔甲护身
Repello Muggletum	麻瓜驱逐
Finite Incantatem	咒立停
Obliviate	一忘皆空
Mobiliarbus	幻影移形
Aquamenti	清水如泉

2.2.1 Spell Translation of Mainland China in Forms

According to Table 2, we can say that the translators from Mainland China have the preference to adopt four-character structure in their translation of magical spells like "除你武器", "修复如初". The four-character structure enjoys a long brilliant fame in Chinese literature history and is adopted by dozens of poets and writers in their works. This has proved the fact of the frequent adoption of this structure in the translation of *Harry Potter*. It is also a proof of mastering this language by which the readers can be deeply impressed. However, despite the fact that the four-character structure is a fantastic literal expression used in translation, as the children being the major group

of the target audiences, this structure seems tough to let those young readers understand. The translators in Mainland China sacrificed the child stuff to achieve an integration of harmony and conciseness.

2.2.2 Spell Translation of Mainland China in Meanings

Compared with duplicative, the four-character structure that the translators of Mainland China adopted is more concise and complete in conveying the information in the magical spells. An example below can clarify the idea.

The magical spell "Expelliarmus" has the effect to disarm the enemy by knocking his magic wand into the air. The translators in Taiwan translate this spell into "去去，武器走". This translation can cause a vague understanding of the spell, confusing the audiences by the expected effect. While the version of Mainland China is "除你武器". "除" in Chinese means to expel. This translation makes a concise and clear meaning that is to expel the magic wand of the enemy. But as we can figure it out, translation like this lack the fun and vividness to the children who are willing to get more interesting things from the book.

The advantage of combing direct and indirect translation is obvious. It purports to recreate the image of the source metaphors and at the same time reduce the target readers' processing efforts. Yet this strategy cannot be applied to every metaphor translation as too much extra material added, the translation may lose its conciseness and only reads like an annotation of the original work.

Take the spell "Expecto Patronum" for another example. In this spell, there are two parts, one is "Expecto" which is the origin of "Expect", and the other one is "Patronum"— the origin of "Patron". In this spell patron means the guardian of the spellcaster. We can associate this spell with the effect of calling up a guardian to protect the spellcaster from the most terrible devil in the story —The Dementor who can indirectly kill the target by absorbing the soul from him. The reduplicative was used in the translation of Taiwan. They translated this spell as "疾疾，护法现身". "护法" represents "Patron" and "现身" represents "Expectro". However it is a little farfetched from the original meaning. Compared with Taiwan version, the version of Mainland China "护神护卫"is clearer in meanings and well considered to transmit the literal effect of this spell. As a defensive spell, it is full of beauty and charms. "呼" is equal to "Expectro" which means to call up and "神" is a positive word to add color and emotion to "护卫" which means the guardian. This can be one of the most successful spell translations of Mainland China for it is both concise and beautiful in meanings. It reveals the idea that the translation should have intertextual coherence with the original work.

Spell Translation in *Harry Potter* From the Perspective of
Skopostheorie: A Comparative Analysis on the Versions
From Mainland China and Taiwan

2.3 Spell Translation in Taiwan

Table 3
Translations of Taiwan

Spells	Translation in Taiwan
Accio	速速前
Reparo	复复修
Stupefy	咄咄失
Expelliarmus	去去　武器走
Silencio	默默静
Avada Kedavra	阿哇呾喀呾啦
Wingardium Leviosa	温咖癫啦唯啊萨
Avis	飞飞禽
Impedimenta	喷喷障
Protego	破心护
Repello Muggletum	去去　麻瓜走
Finite Incantatem	止止　魔咒消
Obliviate	空空遗忘
Mobiliarbus	呼呼移
Aquamenti	水水喷

2.3.1 Spell Translation of Taiwan in Forms

The most obvious feature of the translation in Taiwan is the usage of reduplicative. The usage of reduplicative in the translation of children's literature has a long history (Chen, 1959, p.59). Harry Potter is no doubt a classic work of children's literature. The reason why reduplicative has been adopted for many times is because the reduplicative has its own charm to children (Zheng, 2010, p.191). First when we put two same syllables together we find the beauty of sound. Children can be easily fascinated by reduplicative because they are sensitive to sounds and will mentally accept the content in the book. This can help them remember and understand difficult words. Second, a well-organized reduplication can help children create a vivid picture in the mind. Children are cultivated to be actively thinking and in this way they are enlightened to be more creative in thoughts. What is more, good reduplicative can add emotional colors to the book within the understanding of children. The children can indeed taste happiness, anger, and fear that are hidden in the words.

In Skopostheorie, translators are required to translate for target audiences of this book—children. And the adoption of duplicative fully represents this idea. Because the magical spells written in several languages are of different cultural backgrounds, the usage of duplicative just solve the problem and make the spells simple, vivid as well as understandable to children.

The last two examples show that another adoption in Taiwan's translation is transliteration. Magical spells translated with this adoption are hard for children to understand yet the translator only transfer the sound so that the children can be impressed by visual effect of the spell.

2.3.2 Spell Translation of Taiwan in Meanings

The most frequent adoption of translation skills to translate magical spells in Taiwan, as we have already discussed, are the usage of duplicative and transliteration. These adoptions make meaning of the spells vague to the audience because they can hardly judge the effect of the magical spells according to their literal meanings. They have the better choice to see the visual effect in the films or read the following descriptions in the book.

One of the most significant magical spells in *Harry Potter* is "Expelliarmus" whose effect is to disarm the enemy or the opponents. It is a very common and useful defensive spell in the magical world. The elite wizards of justice—the Aurors prefer to apply this spell to arresting dark and evil wizards instead of using a cursing or murdering spell. Even Harry used this spell for not only once to save his friends. We can find certain evidence that this spell consists of "expel" and "arm". They were put together to get the effect. And let's have a review of the version of Taiwan. The translator from the Crown gave it a name—"去去，武器走". This can lead the audiences to the wrong path by making them misunderstand because they can hardly judge the effect of the spell from its literal meaning. I would tend to think that this spell is to get the magical wand to some other places in a peaceful way. According to this point we can have a rough conclusion that the application of reduplicative is not good to help the reader get the immediate understanding of the spell effect. They have to refer to the whole story to judge what the spell has done to the target.

3. COMPARISON OF TWO VERSIONS FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF SKOPOSTHEORIE

From Skopostheories, the purpose of translation to some extent determines the outcome of translation. In the content below the differences between the spell translations of Taiwan and the Mainland are studied owning to different purposes in the process of translation. The culture differences are given to explain the differences.

3.1 Translation Differences Between Two Regions

According to Skopostheorie, the Skopos of the translation is to satisfy the needs of the target audiences. So the translators will always consider this as their priority in the translation.

Table 4
A Comparison of Spell Translations

Spells	Translation in Taiwan	Translation of Mainland China
Accio	速速前	飞来咒
Reparo	复复修	修复如初
Stupefy	咄咄失	混混倒地
Expelliarmus	去去 武器走	除你武器
Silencio	默默静	无声无息
Avada Kedavra	阿哇咀喀咀啦	阿瓦达索命
Wingardium Leviosa	温咖癫啦唯啊萨	羽加迪姆勒维奥萨
Avis	飞飞禽	群鸟飞飞
Impedimenta	喷喷障	障碍重重
Protego	破心护	盔甲护身
Repello Muggletum	去去 麻瓜走	麻瓜驱逐
Finite Incantatem	止止 魔咒消	咒立停
Obliviate	空空遗忘	一忘皆空
Mobiliarbus	呼呼移	幻影移形
Aquamenti	水水喷	清水如泉

Through the careful analysis of the magical spell translation of Mainland China and Taiwan, it is proved that the translation of Taiwan shows more concern for the young readers. Many duplicative are used in the translation and this fit the function concept in the Skopostheorie. Because the target readers are the young generations, the translators in Taiwan fully consider this point in their works, making the translation more understandable to those young kids. However, the translators in Mainland China frequently adopt four-character structure in their translation. This is good to explain what the magical spell is and what effect it has, being faithful to the intertextual Coherence (to the original text). But it loses the charm that duplicative would have to the kids. For them, reading a book full of four-character structure is no longer an enjoyable task. They have to overcome the trouble from strange spells.

Compared with the translation of Taiwan, the version published by People's Literature Publishing House, China is far more commercialized as we can draw the conclusion from a simple translation of magical spells (Wu, 2007, p.55). The translators translate *Harry Potter* both for the young readers and for the adults. The publisher has cast eyes on the market of all ages, regarding *Harry Potter* as the bestseller to all tastes.

Overall, although we have already committed the idea that the spell translation of Mainland China is more understandable as an individual spell, the audiences usually see the magical spell from its literal or visual effect from the context. As is written in the book "*Harry Potter and the Phoenix Order*":

A towering, hooded was gliding smoothly towards him, hovering over the ground. Not feet or face visible beneath its robes, sucking on the night as it came. Stumbling backwards, Harry raised his wand 'Expecto patronum!' An enormous silver stag erupted from the tip of Harry's wand; its antler caught the Dementor in the place where the heart should have been; it was thrown backwards, weightless as darkness, and as the stag charged, the Dementor swooped away, bat-like and defeated. (Rowling, 2003, p.19)

This was the scene that Harry Potter encountered the devil-Dementor in a dark street with his brother Dudley. The author described the approach of Dementor, which was terrifying and vivid, and Potter was forced to use the patron magic to protect himself. Then the author fully illustrated the effect of the patron magic. So the audience can also judge the effect of the spell effect from the context. In this view, even if the application of reduplicative is making the translation less understandable, there are other ways to make them clear. We can conclude from this point that the translation version of Taiwan is also very successful in terms of Skopostheorie because they have shown great concern to children and the translation would still be very easy to understand when we judge from the context.

3.2 Culture Differences Between Two Regions

Both of the people from Mainland China and Taiwan inherited traditional Chinese culture from our forefathers. But after a few decades' separation, people of two regions have developed their own cultures.

It is obvious that the political factor has a great impact on the diversity of culture between two regions. That is, the social political system leads the culture to different directions. In history, Mainland China suffered turmoil such as the Culture Revolution and the Great Leap, which destroyed considerable classic culture of ancient china at that time. We refused to communicate with the western countries and its cultures and even had conflicts inside our land. On the contrary, Taiwan has kept the original classics of china and the exchange of culture with foreign countries has made Taiwan even richer in culture. This can account for several points in translating *Harry Potter*. The translation in Taiwan is more classical in words and the version of Mainland China has more writing in the vernacular (Luo & Liu, 2008, p.67).

Currently Mainland China has put all the concentration on the development of economy and the improvement of living condition of its citizens. It is understandable to make the legend of children's literature into a bestseller for all age groups. Despite the fact that the four-character structure is not always interesting to children, the application of this structure can fascinate more people to read this book as it is less childish and understandable. Adults will not feel as if they are fooled around by kind of ridiculous children's story. However the translators in Taiwan are fully convinced that a great work should and must be translated

Spell Translation in *Harry Potter* From the Perspective of
Skopostheorie: A Comparative Analysis on the Versions
From Mainland China and Taiwan

to meet the need of its target audience—the children. The usage of reduplicative is a very good example because only children are in need of this structure while adults will think it boring. Still the translators of Taiwan try their best to satisfy the children for they believe *Harry Potter* series are very precious for them.

Both the commercialization and faithfulness can be reasonable in translation and they can reflect the social trends and cultural differences between two regions. We had better show respect to both for the hard work of the translators.

CONCLUSION

This paper observes the varying strategies used in the Taiwan and Mainland Chinese translations of the magical spells in the *Harry Potter* series. The comparison of two versions within the Skopostheorie can help us understand their differences better, and at the same time we can know some cultural differences between Mainland China and Taiwan. There still existed some room for improvement. For example, the spells chosen didn't cover all the spells in the *Harry Porter* series. Some further research should be made in order to perfect the study.

REFERENCES

Chen B. C. (1959). *A brief introduction to children's literature*. Wuchang: Chang Jiang Literature and Art Publishing House.

Gideon, T. (1995). *Descriptive translation studies and beyond*. Amsterdam & Philadelphia: John Benjamins.

Jiang, S. Q. (2008). Harry Potter studies. *Journal of Inner Mongolia University, 40*(1), 42-47.

Luo G. F., & Liu G. H. (2008). The dialysis of "Harry Potter" cultural phenomena. *Journal of Hubei Radio and Television University*, *28*(5), 67-68.

Ma, A. N., & Ma, A. X. (Trans.). (2003). *Harry Potter and the order of the phoenix*. Beijng: People's Literature Publishing House.

Munday, J. (2001). *Introducing translation studies: Theories and applications*. London.

Nord, C. (2001). *Translating as a purposeful activity: Functionalist approaches explained*. Shanghai: Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press.

Rowling, J. K. (2003). *Harry Potter and the order of the Phoenix*. London: Bloomsbury.

Rowling, J. K. (2009). *Harry Potter and the death Hallows*. London: Bloomsbury.

The Crown Translation Groups. (Trans.). (2003). *Harry Potter and the order of the Phoenix*. Taiwan: The Crown Publishing House.

Wu, Y. H. (2007). A discussion on the translation strategies of children's literature. *Journal of Sichuan College of Education, 23*(10), 53-55.

Zheng, Y. K. (2010). The spell translation in harry porter series from perspective of descriptive translation theory. *Legal System and Society, 10*(4), 191.

Zhu, L. H. (2007). Skopos theory & the translation of Harry Porter. *Journal of Nanchang College*, *22*(2), 36-38.