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**RESEARCH ARTICLE**

## On the Translators' Subjectivity in Forestry Translation

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**ABSTRACT**

Forestry translation is of paramount importance due to the critical role the texts play in advancing forestry research and practice globally. A quality translation ensures that valuable scientific knowledge and technological advancements are accessible to a broader audience, fostering international collaboration and innovation in forestry. The texts in this field, however, are characterized by their specialized terminology, tight syntactic structure, and coherent textual structure, posing significant challenges to translation tasks. These challenges necessitate translators' subjectivity, which means translators must utilize their essential qualities, like language competence, professional knowledge, and information-searching ability, to ensure that their translated text is not only accurate but also accessible and comprehensible to the target audience. By doing so, the purpose of translation can be achieved to the greatest extent. This essay explores how translators' subjectivity exerts an impact on the quality of forestry translation. Through a detailed analysis, it concludes that the translators' subjectivity is pivotal for forestry translation, which can help reduce the misinterpretation and ambiguity of the translated texts by using some translation skills. This paper aims to provide theoretical support and practical guidance for improving the accuracy, accessibility, and adaptability of forestry translation, thus better promoting the advancement of global forestry research and practice and facilitating environmental protection and sustainable development around the world.

**KEYWORDS**

The Translator' Subjectivity, Forestry Translation, Quality, Development.

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### 1. Introduction

Forestry science and technology serve as a key sector in propelling the green economy and ensuring ecological security in the progress of globalization, which highlights the importance of international cooperation and exchange in this field(Yin, 2024). In this context, a quality translation is of great value, not only promoting international knowledge sharing and technical exchange but also China's forestry science and technology progress and international competitiveness. There are, however, great challenges in forestry translation due to its texts featuring specialized terminology, tight syntactic structure, and coherent textual structure. The translator, the subject of translation activities, plays an active role in addressing these challenges. Without the intervention of translators, any valuable science and technology are just nothing to readers of different languages, and no high-tech products can go to the world stage(Shen, 2019). However, the study of translators' subjectivity mainly focuses on literary translation, with only a few relevant discussions on scientific and technological translation, let alone forestry translation. Therefore, this paper delves into the impact of the translators' subjectivity on the quality of forestry translation, demonstrating how it helps to reduce the misinterpretation and ambiguity of translated texts in translation practice by using some translation skills. Hope it can provide theoretical support and practical guidance for the translation practice in this field later, contributing to advancing global forestry research, promoting environmental protection, and supporting sustainable development efforts worldwide.

## **2. Literature Review**

In China, the translators' subjectivity has also been continuously demonstrated, from the literal translation of the sutras by Dao An and Xuan Zang to the re-creation of Yan Fu under the principle of "faithfulness" to Fu Lei's "spiritual resemblance" and Qian Zhongshu's free translation in "Huajing(sublimation)." With the growing attention on the translators' subjectivity, many scholars, both domestically and internationally, have conducted in-depth research on it. In the domestic sphere, research related to the translators' subjectivity is mainly sorted into the following aspects. The first is to explore the translators' subjectivity from the perspectives of different translation theories, for example, Chen(2024) from the perspective of balanced-harmonious translation; Cui and Li(2023) from Transknowletology; Hu and Zhong(2023), Yu(2015) and Liang(2008) from fusion of horizons; Xia and Wang(2024), Guo and Wang(2019) and Liu(2016) from the hermeneutics theory; Tu(2015) from Pierre Bourdieu sociological lens; Chen(2014) from the feminist translation theory; Qin(2019), Zhang(2018), and Liu(2011) from translation ecology, Wang(2015) from dynamic adaptation, to name but a few. The second is to study the translators' subjectivity in the translation of different fields, for instance, Gan(2021), Jiang(2016) and Song(2006) in literary translation; Sun(2019), Fu(2019), and Li and Jiang(2009) in the translation of sci and tech texts; Shen(2019) in Translation of Aerospace Science and Technology Texts. The third is to delve into how to apply the translators' subjectivity, for example, Wang and Zhan(2019) through research on cultural function mistranslation; Zhu(2009) through a case study of Zhang Guroo; Lu(2015) through Pearl S.Buck's English translation version of *Outlaws of the Marsh*. In addition, Dai and Qi(2024) discussed the dialectic relationship among the three attributes of translators' subjectivity, namely, self-centrality, initiative, and passivity. Tao(2019) analyzed the restrictions of translators' subjectivity. In the study of traditional Western translation theories, translators have always been viewed as "servants," from which we can see the lower status of translators. Since the 1970s, the translator's position in translation has been gradually valued with the appearance of a "cultural turn" in Western translation theory, especially in Susan Bassnett's book *Translation, History and Culture*(Douglas, 2006). This turn has actively promoted the traditional translation study from the linguistic level to the cultural level, from the source language study to the target language study. The subject status of translation has been emphasized, and the translator has also experienced a long process from the background to the front, from the invisible person to the subject(Bassnett, 1980). Marco(2009) also researched what to make of translator subjectivity. Despite the wealth of existing research on the translator's subjectivity, an exploration of it in forestry translation remains conspicuously absent from both domestic and international scholarship. Therefore, this study aims to fill this gap and offer theoretical support and practical guidance for the translation practice in this field later.

## **3. The Features and Challenges of Forestry Sci and Tech Texts**

Forestry is engaged in the protection, expansion, rational development, and comprehensive utilization of forest resources. In the scientific sense, forestry is a huge, comprehensive discipline, with dozens of sub-disciplines and specialties under six categories, namely, the basis of forestry, forest management, forest engineering, forest product processing, and economic management. These sub-disciplines and specialties intersect and penetrate with many adjacent disciplines in industry, agriculture, animal husbandry, and fishery. The wide range of knowledge forestry scientific and technological text covers determines its features, namely specialized terminology, tight syntactic structure, and coherent textual structure, which presents lots of challenges to forestry translations. This section analyzed the unique features of forestry translation, illustrating how these features pose challenges through concrete examples.

### **3.1 Specialized Terminology**

Specialized terminology is a hallmark of forestry scientific and technological texts. In the process of the evolution of English, a large number of foreign words are absorbed to form new words, a large number of life words are borrowed into the field of forestry science and technology and give them professional complex meanings, and a large number of word formation such as derivation, compounding, blending, and clipping, are used to transform old words to synthesize new terms or reduce terms. Therefore, we can often see specialized terminology in the form of Latin, common words, abbreviations, and new words.

The first challenge in forestry translation is the Latin species names, which are easy to find if you take a close look at the forestry scientific and technological texts. Why use Latin names? The short answer is twofold. The most important reason is that there is only one correct Latin name for any plant species. It is the rule first suggested by the Swedish naturalist Karl Linnaeus in the 18th century to avoid confusion among scientists. After all, common names for trees can change between countries and may even vary within the same country. The second reason is that Latin isn't spoken by anyone, and thus, it doesn't change over time. Thus, we can rely on a Latin name to mean exactly the same thing that it did 300 years ago. However, it is hard to translate the exact meaning due to its writing rules. For example, *Dalbergia latifolia Roxb.* Obviously, the Latin species names mainly consist of two parts: the genus and the specific epithet(sometimes, plus an Authority - the name of the person who published it - if you want to be absolutely correct.) Sometimes, for simplicity, the naming person is often omitted. The genus itself can also be in the form of an abbreviation. For instance, *D. latifolia*, *D. fusca*, and *H. mutabilis*. If you don't know these rules but simply consult these words in the dictionary, you may get nothing or can't get the accurate meaning.

The second challenge in translation is the common words with specialized meanings. These kinds of words are often polysemy. In our daily life, these words can be seen everywhere and at any time. Therefore, these words may mislead or puzzle you when doing forestry translation. For example, "Bark" usually refers to "The sound a dog makes." However, in forestry text, it means "The protective outer covering of a tree."; "Stand" usually means "To be in an upright position on the feet.", while in forestry text, it refers to "A group of trees growing in a specific area."; "Litter" commonly means "Trash or waste material.", while in forestry texts, it means "A layer of dead plant material (such as leaves, twigs, and branches) that covers the forest floor." to name but a few. Therefore, there would be misinterpretation of the original texts in the translated texts easily if the translator takes these kinds of words for granted or simply relies on machine translation. For example, in the term "She oak," you know both words, but the accurate meaning of which is not what you thought. In the forestry field, it, also known as *Casuarina equisetifolia*, is a unique and fascinating species of evergreen tree native to Australia.

The third challenge is dealing with the abbreviations that are prevalent in scientific texts. Abbreviations can be particularly challenging in forestry translation because it is hard for translators without such background to figure them out. For instance, Day Neutral Plant are often in its abbreviation form: DNP. However, when you look up DNP in the dictionary, you may find that it is also the abbreviation of Dynamic Nuclear Polarization or dinitrophenol. At the same time, it would easily cause misinterpretation of your translated texts if you are not familiar with the knowledge in this field. Similarly, DBH is the abbreviation of "Diameter at Breast Height." However, if a translator just translates the acronym, it's hard to ensure that the full term is understood by the target audience, which will lead to an ineffective translation.

The fourth challenge is the new words formed by derivation, compounding, blending, clipping, and many other methods. For example, "reforestation" is formed through derivation, which is derived from the root word "forest" with the prefix "re-" and the suffix "-ation," meaning the process of planting trees on the land that has previously been forested but was cleared. "Bio" is a clipped form of the longer word "biology," which is often used in terms like "biomass," referring to the total mass of organisms in a given area or volume. "agroforestry" is a blend of "agriculture" and "forestry," often used to describe farming that includes growing trees to produce wood. "Watershed" is a compound word formed from "water" and "shed," referring to an area of land where all the water under it or draining off of it goes into the same place. Instances such as these are extremely common. Some new words are simple to translate, while there are still some that have complex word formations, which are not so easy for translators to handle.

### 3.2 Tight Syntactic Structure

Another typical characteristic of forestry science English lies in its tight syntactic structure, which is shown in the following aspects. In order to give a detailed, impartial, and accurate technical description, the texts tend to use long sentences, like complex sentences, compound sentences, and compound complex sentences. Such sentences often contain many modifiers, including phrases, clauses, non-predicate structures. Besides, there are special sentence structures, like inverted sentences, elliptical sentences, and cleft sentences. In addition, impersonal sentences and passive sentences are also commonly used in forestry science English. All these above present significant challenges for translators.

The first challenge is to tackle the long sentences. Sentences in formal technical texts usually contain lots of information and turn out to be very complex, with many layers of structure. For instance, *The temple of Queen Hatshepsut, constructed in 1500 B.C. at Thebes, Egypt, has depictions of myrrh trees, introduced from Somalia, planted as sources of perfume, and Theophrastus reported trees from Somalia, planted as sources of perfume, and Theophrastus reported trees of frankincense and myrrh planted on private estates in southern Arabia in the fourth century B.C.* With a length of 57 words, this sentence is very long and complex, and it contains four non-predicated structures (actually the omitted subordinate sentences) as post modifiers. Here, the first "and" in the sentence reveals the essential logic of the sentence, and the second "and" links two different tree species. From this, it can be easily seen that it is hard to ensure that the information is clearly and correctly conveyed in the target language if the translator doesn't have good competence in the language.

The second challenge of the forestry translation is to deal with special sentence structures, like inverted sentences, elliptical sentences, and cleft sentences. Sometimes, inverted sentences are used to emphasize some information. In translation, you should identify these sentences so as to better achieve their purpose. For instance, *Never before had researchers encountered such extensive evidence of ecosystem resilience, nor did they anticipate the implications this discovery would have on future conservation strategies.* The inversion makes "Never before" the focal point, underscoring the rarity and importance of the event. Sometimes, in order to make sentences more concise, an elliptical sentence structure is employed. For example, *Given the extensive deforestation, coupled with climate change, many species are now at risk, their habitats degraded, their numbers dwindling.* Furthermore, the feature of long and complex sentences brings about the high frequency of cleft sentences in forestry texts. A good example is that *Insects that can injure or, if not kept under control, destroy stands of trees exist in eight classes, as follows.* In translation, you should pay attention to these special sentences, not only to the accuracy but also to the effect of getting the author's intention across.

The third challenge is to deal with sentences that include extensive use of passive voice and inanimate subjects, which are common in forestry texts. For example, *The data were collected using remote sensing techniques and analyzed through a series of statistical models to determine the impact of deforestation on biodiversity.* In translation practice, sometimes it is hard for translators to determine whether to retain the passive voice or convert it to active voice, considering the accuracy of the translated texts and the readability preferences of the target audience. Besides, it is worth noting that these sentence structures in forestry texts are intended for certain purposes, which also need consideration in the process of translation.

### **3.3 Coherent Textual Structure**

Forestry science and technology passages often exhibit a coherent textual structure that enhances the logical flow and comprehensibility of complex information. This coherence is achieved through well-organized sections, clear headings and subheadings, and the use of various textual elements such as definitions, explanations, examples, and references. The following examples and explanations illustrate the characteristics of coherent textual structure in forestry texts and the challenges they pose for translators. For example,

*Insects that can injure or, if not kept under control, destroy stands of trees exist in eight classes, as follows:*

- *Defoliators chewing insects that destroy or injure the foliage of coniferous and deciduous trees by stripping them of their leaves, which causes food production to stop. ....*
- *Wood borers chewing insects with mouth parts that bore into the sapwood and heartwood of branches or attack stems and roots, which makes the wood less useful for commercial purposes.*
- *Sucking insects have mouth parts that can penetrate tissues, enabling the insect to suck fluid from a tree. These are mostly aphids and scales. ...*

Surely, there are many other examples to demonstrate the coherence of the textual structure; instead of listing them here, we need to be aware of the challenges it poses to translation, like how to maintain the coherence and logic of the original structure, keep the consistency of the terminology, and ensure the clarity, accuracy, and effectiveness in conveying technical terms and concepts.

## **4. The Analysis of Translators' Subjectivity in Forestry Translation**

According to Zha and Tian(2003), a translator's subjectivity refers to "the translator's subjective initiative in translation activities to realize the translation purpose under the premise of respecting the translation object." In the realm of forestry translation, the role of the translator extends beyond merely converting text from one language to another. Translators must actively engage with the translation, applying their knowledge and skills to ensure the forestry translation is accurate, accessible, and adaptable. This chapter explores how the translator's subjectivity can effectively address the challenges posed by the features of forestry texts, namely, specialized terminology, tight syntactic structures, and coherent textual structure. Through concrete examples, we will demonstrate the positive impact of translators' subjectivity on the accuracy, accessibility, and adaptability of forestry translation.

### **4.1 Translators' Subjectivity and the Accuracy of Forestry Translation**

Accuracy is paramount in forestry translation due to the technical nature of the content and its reliance on precise terminology. Translators must not only have a deep understanding of forestry concepts but also the ability to accurately convey these concepts in the target language. Translators' subjectivity plays a crucial role in ensuring this accuracy.

In the former part, we have discussed the feature of specialized terminology, which causes a lot of obstacles in forestry translation. For example, *Modern uses of resins are in the manufacture of paint, varnish, and lacquers, as **size** in paper making to provide lustre and weight and to hinder the absorption of ink and moisture, and in making soap.* "Size" is familiar to all of us. However, it will cause misinterpretation if we view it as a common word when doing forestry translation. Actually, in this forestry text, "size" here is not related to the physical dimensions or volume of the paper but rather to a substance that is applied to paper during the manufacturing process to change its properties. However, if translators notice the specialized terminology in the form of common words because of their professional knowledge or caution, accuracy could be ensured. Besides, look at this sentence: *Viruses cause minor galls and serious phloem necrosis in elms and locusts.* "Locusts" can be translated into many different names in Chinese, like "蝗虫", "洋槐" and "刺槐". In addressing this kind of challenge, the translator should consult the word through all kinds of tools to testify your translation, and meanwhile also give its Latin species name in your translated text, like "刺槐(*Robina Pseudocacia*)," so as to guarantee the accuracy of your translation. After all, there is only one correct Latin name for any plant species. By doing so, it can be easy for the target readers to understand, ensuring the accuracy of the translated text to the greatest extent.

Another challenge is posed by the long and complex sentence. Here is a good example. *Despite the substantial advancements in sustainable forestry practices, which aim to balance the economic, ecological, and social functions of forest landscapes, the unpredictable effects of climate change, combined with the intricate inter-dependencies among forest species, present significant*

challenges that require adaptive management strategies and continuous scientific research to mitigate potential negative impacts effectively. In dealing with such a long and complex sentence, reading the full text is the first step, then followed by breaking down the sentence, like finding out the main clauses, non-predicate structure, subordinate clauses, and coordinate clauses, and the step of reviewing and refining are also needed after translating. All these above necessitate translators' subjectivity, actively engaging in the translation instead of acting like a passive work machine.

Through the active application of their professional knowledge and language competence, translators can ensure that the translated text remains accurate, maintaining the faithfulness of the information conveyed.

#### 4.2 Translators' Subjectivity and the Accessibility of Forestry Translation

Accessibility refers to the ease with which the target audience can understand and engage with the translated text. In forestry translation, this involves making complex scientific information comprehensible to a broader audience, which can include policymakers, practitioners, and the general public. Translators' subjectivity is essential in making these texts accessible to different audiences. Here are some examples as follows.

According to the Text Type Theory by Peter Newmark, forestry sci and tech text is informative text, which puts the informational function of language first. Therefore, if the information of the original text can't be accessible to its target readers, we can say the translation is not effective. For example, *In the Lake Superior area, moose have formed browse lines as high as 11 feet from the ground in satisfying their hunger.* If "11 feet" in this sentence is translated into Chinese, "11英尺", it would be difficult for Chinese readers to understand, thus leading to the information inaccessible to the target readers. However, if the translator considers this point, adding supplementary explanation behind, like "11英尺(约335.28厘米)", it would be easier for readers to get it across understanding the real intention of the writer. This can be counted as an effective translation.

In the above section, we also discussed the challenge posed by coherent textual structure. Next example will demonstrate how to address this challenge through translators' subjectivity.

*Insects that can injure or, if not kept under control, destroy stands of trees exist in eight classes, as follows:*

- **Defoliators** chewing insects that destroy or injure the foliage...
- **Wood borers**, chewing insects with mouth parts that bore into the sapwood ...
- **Sucking insects** have mouth parts that can penetrate tissues, ...
- **Gall makers**, insects that cause swellings on leaves or twigs or ...
- **Bark beetles**, insects with chewing mouth parts that attack the stem of ...
- **Terminal feeders** insects that feed in the tips of the twigs, buds, and shoots, ...
- **Root feeders**, mostly beetle larvae called white grubs and wire worms. ...
- **Seed insects** deposit eggs within developing cones. The larvae feed unnoticed ...

From this text, we can know that this passage introduces eight kinds of pests that destroy the stands of trees. So, when translating the names of these pests, we need to try our best to maintain the consistency of the structure. For example, If "Terminal feeders" in this part is translated into Chinese as "终端取食者," it may confuse the target readers to some extent. If you can't find the meaning of terminology in the dictionary, you should turn to the context. Then, you will find "terminal" here, which refers to the top part of tree branches. Like "食叶害虫," the translation of "Defoliators" "Terminal feeders" can be translated into Chinese as "枝梢害虫". Similarly, "Root feeder" can be translated into Chinese as "根部害虫" instead of "根部取食者". Through translators' adjustment, the translation can be more effective.

In translation, the translator should not be completely obedient to the original work or the original author of the "slave"; blindly hard translation sometimes exerts the translator's subjectivity so that access to information is more helpful.

By considering the target audience's background and adjusting the translation accordingly, translators can enhance the accessibility of forestry texts, ensuring that vital information is effectively communicated to all stakeholders involved.

#### 4.3 Translators' Subjectivity and the Adaptability of Forestry Translation

Adaptability refers to the translator's ability to modify the translation to fit different cultural contexts, regional features, and practical applications. In forestry translation, this involves not only linguistic adjustments but also translation skills that make the text adapt to diverse settings. Some examples are listed below.

In addition to finding accurate translations for specialized terms, translators must be aware of regional variations in terminology. For example, the terms "lumber" and "timber" have the same meaning in Chinese. However, the two terms also have differences. "lumber" is commonly used in North America, while "timber" is the preferred term in the UK and Australia. Translators must choose the appropriate term based on the target audience's regional context to maintain its adaptability.

Besides, there is another example. *The pigments responsible for photosynthesis absorb radiation most efficiently in the violet-blue and orange-red wavelengths, which are parts of the visible lights.* When you look up "violet-blue" in the dictionary, you will easily know its meaning. But if you translate "violet-blue" into Chinese as "紫蓝光" like a dictionary, it does not read so smoothly for the Chinese audience. In Chinese, we tend to say "蓝紫光" in expressing the term "violet-blue" wavelength instead of "紫蓝光." Therefore, through the modification by translators who have considered the difference between the two languages, the translation can be more adaptable to the target readers.

We both know that two languages differ in many aspects, especially in the syntactic structure. In dealing with the challenges it presents, the translators' subjectivity makes a great difference. For example, *The data were collected using remote sensing techniques and analyzed through a series of statistical models to determine the impact of deforestation on biodiversity.* In this sentence, the writer uses passive voice and inanimate subject. When we translate this sentence into Chinese, we should shift the passive voice to the active voice and use animate subject so as to make the translation more adaptable to the target readers.

By considering the difference and adjusting the translation accordingly, translators can enhance the adaptability of forestry texts, ensuring that vital information is effectively conveyed.

## 5. Conclusion

The translators' subjectivity in forestry translation plays a pivotal role in overcoming the challenges posed by specialized terminology, tight syntactic structures, and coherent textual structure. Instead of being a servant of the original texts, translators should actively engage in the process of translation, utilizing their professional knowledge, language competence, translation skills, and information-searching ability to make the forestry translation more accurate, accessible, and adaptable. To be specific, translators should consult specialized dictionaries, glossaries, and experts in this field to verify terms and ensure precision, especially cautious of those terms in the form of common words. Besides, translators should fully consider the difference between the two languages as well as the preference or the background of the target readers, using some translation skills, including amplification, omission, inversion, conversion, division, combination, and so on, to make the translation readable and effective. By actively engaging in the process of translation, translators can enhance the accuracy, accessibility, and adaptability of forestry translations. This not only ensures effective communication of vital forestry knowledge but also supports the global dissemination and application of best practices in forestry science and technology.

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