

The application of the functional equivalence theory in the translation of special education materials

Qiang Chen

PhD student
Changchun University
Changchun, China
chenqiang@ccu.edu.cn
ORCID 0000-0000-0000-0000

Xiaoqi Sun

Bachelor
Changchun University
Changchun, China
3101502806@qq.com
ORCID 0000-0000-0000-0000

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Abstract

With the acceleration of globalization, cross-cultural communication in the field of special education is becoming increasingly frequent, and the demand for translation of special education materials is also growing. The theory of functional equivalence provides important theoretical guidance for the translation of special education materials. This article explores the applicability of functional equivalence theory in the translation of special education materials, and analyzes how to achieve functional equivalence from the perspectives of vocabulary cognition, syntactic structure, original text understanding, cultural background, and reader response. At the same time, strategies have been proposed to improve the translation quality of special education materials, including enhancing cross-cultural awareness, optimizing translation methods, paying attention to translation details, and strengthening post translation evaluation. The aim of this study is to provide reference for the translation practice of special education materials and promote cross-cultural communication in the field of special education.

Keywords

functional equivalence theory; special education materials; translation application.

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Introduction

In the field of special education, textbook translation is not only a simple conversion of language and text, but also involves deeper aspects, including cultural transmission, exchange of educational concepts, and sharing of educational methods. Functional equivalence theory, as a translation theory, emphasizes the

functional equivalence between the translated text and the original text, meaning that the translated text should perform the same functions as the original text in the target language environment.

This theory provides a new perspective and methodology for the translation of special education materials. It guides translators not only to pay attention to the accuracy of language, but also to the cultural differences behind the source language and target language, as well as the reception habits and reactions of readers in different cultural backgrounds (Qingyong, 2022).

By comprehensively considering these aspects, translators can more accurately handle the complex relationship between language, cultural differences, readers, and reactions, thereby effectively improving translation quality and ensuring the applicability and effectiveness of special education materials in different cultural backgrounds.

Materials and research methods

The theory of functional equivalence was proposed by the renowned American translation theorist Eugene Nida. The core concept is «functional equivalence», emphasizing that translation should not pursue mechanical correspondence on the surface of vocabulary, but should strive to achieve functional equivalence between two languages. The translation of special education materials has significant uniqueness as it contains a large number of professional terms, such as «intellectual disabilities» and «learning disabilities».

If these terms are not translated properly, it may lead to serious misunderstandings. In addition, special education materials include various special education methods and concepts, such as Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) and sensory integration training. Accurately conveying these contents to the target language readers is crucial. The applicability of functional equivalence theory is mainly reflected in several aspects. It helps translators break free from the limitations of the source language form, starting from the functions and purposes of special education materials, such as educational guidance and knowledge transmission. In this way, the translation in the target language can maintain a high degree of consistency with the source language in terms of information transmission and educational effectiveness.

Results and discussion

The field of special education is filled with numerous professional terms and unique vocabulary. The accuracy of their translation directly affects the understanding of the materials. Achieving functional equivalence at the lexical level requires translators to not only grasp the literal meanings of the words but also understand their connotations and functions within the context of special education (Zhang, 2023). For example, the translation of «autism spectrum disorder» accurately conveys the scope and characteristics of the disorder, enabling readers in the target language to achieve the same level of cognitive understanding as those in the source language. Moreover, functional equivalence is equally indispensable for terms with cultural nuances. For instance, the term «Individualized Education Program (IEP)» is used directly in its English abbreviation with an explanation provided. This approach not only retains its professionalism but also facilitates comprehension for readers in the target language, avoiding misunderstandings caused by cultural differences and achieving functional equivalence in lexical cognition. In the field of special education, the accurate translation of professional terms is particularly important (Pang, 2023). Terms such as «dyslexia» and «dysgraphia» may seem easy to understand on the surface, but in practice, they involve complex educational interventions and assessment methods. Translators need to provide annotations or explanations to help readers in the target language understand the educational concepts and practical methods behind these terms. Additionally, the translation of emerging terms also requires special attention (Zhang, 2023).

The sentence structures in special education materials are complex and diverse, often containing long and difficult sentences as well as complex grammatical structures. During the translation process, if translated mechanically according to the sentence structure of the source language, the target text may become obscure and difficult to understand, affecting the transmission of information. To achieve functional equivalence in sentence structure, translators need to make reasonable adjustments and reorganizations to the source-language sentences based on the language habits and expression characteristics of the target language. For example, attributive clauses in English can be processed by being placed before or after the main clause

according to Chinese expression habits, making the translation more fluent and natural: «The teaching methods that are used in special education should be tailored to the specific needs of students with disabilities» (Yang, 2020). By adjusting the sentence structure, the translation conforms to Chinese expression habits while accurately conveying the original information, achieving functional equivalence in sentence structure. When dealing with complex sentence structures, translators need to pay special attention to the logical relationships and information levels of the sentences. Special education materials often contain complex structures such as causal relationships, conditional relationships, and progressive relationships. Translators need to ensure the logical clarity of the translation through appropriate conjunctions and sentence – structure adjustments (Zhang, 2023).

Accurately understanding the original text is the basis for achieving functional-equivalent translation. Special education materials involve rich professional knowledge and educational concepts. Translators need to conduct in-depth research on the source text, not only understanding the literal meaning of the words but also grasping its deep-seated meaning and potential functions. For some ambiguous or implicit information, translators should make reasonable inferences in combination with the background knowledge of the special education field and the context. For example, when describing a certain special education intervention method, the original text may only mention some operation steps. Translators need to accurately understand the complete implementation process based on their understanding of the field, so as to present it completely and accurately to the target-language readers in the translation. At the same time, for some words or concepts with multiple interpretations, the most appropriate translation should be selected according to the context and function of the original text to ensure that the translation can accurately convey the intention of the original text and achieve functional equivalence between the understanding of the original text and the expression of the translation. In special education materials, functional equivalence in understanding the original text is also reflected in the accurate grasp of educational concepts and methods (Wenqiong, 2020).

Special education materials are inevitably influenced by cultural backgrounds, and there are certain differences in special education concepts, methods, and practices among different countries and regions. During the translation process, to achieve functional equivalence in cultural background, translators need to fully understand the cultural backgrounds of both the source and target languages and appropriately handle the content related to cultural factors (Zhang, 2023). For example, in some Western countries, special education emphasizes inclusive education, while in some Eastern countries, more attention may be paid to the specialized education in special education institutions. When translating content related to these cultural backgrounds, translators need to help target-language readers understand the cultural differences behind them through annotations, explanations, etc., to avoid misunderstandings of the material content due to cultural misunderstandings. In addition, for some educational cases or stories with cultural characteristics, appropriate cultural conversions are also needed to make them more acceptable to target-language readers, thus achieving functional equivalence of cultural background in translation. Functional equivalence in cultural background is also reflected in the translation of educational systems and policies. There are significant differences in special education systems and policies among different countries. Translators need to help target-language readers understand these differences through appropriate language adjustments and annotations (Cai, 2022).

The Functional Equivalence Theory emphasizes a reader-centered approach, aiming to make target-language readers have similar reactions to source-language readers when reading the translation and the original text. The target readers of special education materials mainly include special education workers, special children, and their parents. During the translation process, translators need to fully consider the background knowledge, reading ability, and needs of the target readers, making the translation conform to the characteristics of the target readers in terms of language expression and content presentation. For example, for materials aimed at parents of special children, the translation should use plain and easy to understand language and avoid excessive professional terms. For academic materials for special education workers, the professionalism and accuracy of the translation should be ensured. At the same time, through pre-testing the translation and collecting feedback, understanding the reactions of the target readers, and timely adjusting the translation strategy, it is ensured that the translation can achieve similar educational, guiding, and other functions as the original text, achieving functional equivalence in reader response. Functional equivalence in reader response is

also reflected in the readability and comprehensibility of the translation. The target readers of special education materials may have different language abilities and background knowledge. Translators need to adjust the language style and expression according to the characteristics of the target readers (Li, 2017).

Cross-cultural awareness is a core element in achieving functional – equivalent translation of special education materials. Special education concepts and practices exhibit diverse characteristics across different cultural backgrounds. This requires translators to deeply understand the culture, history, and social background of both the source-language and target-language countries, especially the cultural differences in the field of special education. Cultural differences are reflected in various aspects of special education, such as educational goals, teaching methods, and the perception of special-needs children. For example, some Western countries emphasize the autonomous development and social integration of special-needs children, while in some Eastern cultures, more importance is attached to the responsibility and role of the family in special education. If translators lack cross-cultural awareness, they may overlook these differences during the translation process, resulting in a translation that is inconsistent with the actual situation of special education in the target-language cultural context. To enhance cross-cultural awareness, translators can learn, communicate, and practice through various channels. At these seminars, translators can directly communicate with special education experts and translators from different countries, gaining an understanding of the development status, policies and regulations, and unique cultural features of special education in each country (Gao, 2018).

Special education materials are highly professional and complex in content. According to the requirements of functional equivalence, translators need to flexibly apply a variety of translation methods. Literal translation and free translation are the most fundamental methods in translation studies. However, in the translation of special education materials, to ensure translation quality, other translation strategies also need to be combined. For professional terms, the method of literal translation with annotations can balance precision and professionalism. For example, «positive behavior support» can be translated literally and then annotated to explain that in the field of special education, this term refers to a method of promoting positive behaviors and reducing problem behaviors by systematically changing the environment (Wenqiong, 2020). This helps readers in the target language to understand its meaning accurately. For content rich in cultural connotations, free translation or cultural adaptation is more appropriate. For example, the «buddy system», which is common in Western special education (where typical students are paired with children with special needs to help them integrate into school life), may be difficult for readers in the target language to understand if translated literally. By using free translation and incorporating the cultural context of the target language, it can be translated as (peer support program), making the content more comprehensible. At the same time, the development of modern translation technology has provided strong support for the translation of special education materials (Li, 2017).

In the translation of special education materials, the importance of handling details cannot be ignored, as details often determine the success or failure of the translation. First of all, translators should carefully check every professional term, data, and piece of information. Terms in the field of special education have specific meanings, and a translation error may lead to serious consequences. For example, mistranslating «intellectual disability» as «intelligent disability» (which has a completely different meaning) can cause readers to have a wrong understanding of the situation of special-needs children (Zhang, 2023). Secondly, details such as punctuation marks and formats are also crucial. The form of the translation should be consistent with the original text and meet the normative requirements of special education materials. For charts, formulas, and other content in special education textbooks, their labels and explanations should be accurately translated, and the format and layout of the charts in the translation should be clear and accurate to avoid affecting readers' understanding of the content. If the data units in the charts are translated incorrectly or the chart layout is chaotic, it will be difficult for readers to obtain key information. In addition, the language style of the translation needs to be unified and standardized. The language style of special education materials should be determined according to the needs of the target readers. Materials for professionals should use rigorous and standardized language, while materials for parents should be more accessible. However, regardless of the style, consistency throughout the text should be ensured to avoid inconsistent or chaotic styles (Li, 2017).

Post - translation evaluation is a crucial link in improving translation quality. By establishing a scientific and reasonable evaluation system, a comprehensive understanding of the translation quality can be obtained,

problems can be identified, and timely improvements can be made. The evaluation process should involve experts, teachers, and target readers in the field of special education. Evaluation should be carried out from multiple dimensions, such as accuracy, fluency, cultural adaptability, and reader response (Zhang, 2023). Accuracy mainly examines whether the translation of professional terms and content information is accurate; fluency focuses on whether the language expression of the translation is natural and smooth, conforming to the language habits of the target language; cultural adaptability assesses whether the translation takes into account the cultural differences between the source and target languages and avoids cultural conflicts; reader response focuses on understanding the degree of understanding and acceptance of the translation by the target readers. For example, organize special education workers and parents of special - needs children to try out the translated materials. Special education workers can point out issues such as the accuracy of term translation and the clarity of the elaboration of teaching methods from a professional perspective. Parents, on the other hand, can provide feedback on whether the translation is easy to understand and meets their needs from the perspective of actual reading and use.

Conclusion

The Functional Equivalence Theory provides an effective theoretical framework for the translation of special education materials. By achieving functional equivalence in vocabulary cognition, sentence structure, understanding of the original text, cultural background, and reader response, the translation quality of special education materials can be effectively improved, promoting cross-cultural exchanges and resource sharing in the field of special education.

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Применение теории функциональной эквивалентности при переводе специальных учебных материалов

Цян Чэнь

Аспирант

Чанчуньский университет

Чанчунь, Китай

chenqiang@ccu.edu.cn

ORCID 0000-0000-0000-0000

Сунь Сяоци

Бакалавр

Чанчуньский университет

Чанчунь, Китай

3101502806@qq.com

ORCID 0000-0000-0000-0000

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Аннотация

С ускорением глобализации межкультурная коммуникация в области специального образования становится все более частой, и спрос на перевод специальных учебных материалов также растет. Теория функциональной эквивалентности предоставляет важные теоретические рекомендации для перевода специальных учебных материалов. В этой статье исследуется применимость теории функциональной эквивалентности при переводе специальных учебных материалов и анализируется, как достичь функциональной эквивалентности с точки зрения понимания лексики, синтаксической структуры, понимания оригинального текста, культурного фона и реакции читателя. В то же время были предложены стратегии для улучшения качества перевода специальных учебных материалов, включая повышение межкультурной осведомленности, оптимизацию методов перевода, уделение внимания деталям перевода и усиление оценки после перевода. Цель данного исследования - предоставить справочные материалы по практике перевода специальных учебных материалов и способствовать межкультурной коммуникации в области специального образования.

Ключевые слова

теория функциональной эквивалентности; специальные учебные материалы; приложение для перевода.

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