

A Study of Transknowletology in the Past Five Years

Bihan Lin ^a, Yuqing Wang ^b

Minnan Normal University, zhangzhou 363000, China.

^a 1172960619@qq.com, ^b 454809258@qq.com

Abstract

Transknowletology has garnered significant academic attention in recent years as an emerging subfield in translation studies. It redefines the essence of translation as a cross-linguistic process of knowledge reproduction, transcending the limitations of traditional language-transfer paradigms. The tripartite framework of “knowledge-language-translator” and the methodological principle of “truth, goodness, and beauty” proposed by Transknowletology offer a novel analytical framework for translation research. Through empirical analysis of applied and comparative studies, it is found that successful knowledge transfer requires a balance among conceptual fidelity, cultural adaptation, and aesthetic representation, thereby establishing a dynamic equilibrium between the knowledge systems of the source and target languages. Against the backdrop of rapid advancements in AI technology, Transknowletology contributes to constructing a translation theory discourse with Chinese characteristics and provides a new analytical framework for understanding cross-cultural knowledge dissemination, holding profound significance for facilitating mutual learning among civilizations.

Keywords

Transknowletology; Literature review; Applied translation; Comparative translation.

1. Introduction

Driven by globalization and digitalization, translation studies are shifting from “language transfer” to “knowledge reproduction.” While traditional translation theories often focused on linguistic equivalence, cultural adaptation, or ideological manipulation, the rise of Transknowletology fundamentally reconstructs the epistemological foundation of translation studies. Yang Feng [1], in the Manifesto of Transknowletology, first explicitly proposed that the essence of translation is “cross-lingual knowledge processing, reconstruction, and re-dissemination,” rather than merely the transfer of signs or culture. This theoretical breakthrough addresses the long-standing disciplinary positioning debate within translation studies and provides a new analytical framework for understanding the power relations, ethical constraints, and cognitive reconstruction involved in the global flow of knowledge.

In recent years, the rise of artificial intelligence (e.g., ChatGPT) has brought profound changes to knowledge production and dissemination, making the “knowledge attribute” of translation increasingly prominent. On the one hand, AI technology can efficiently handle multilingual knowledge migration. However, on the other hand, the “subjectless knowledge” it generates may sever the connection between translation and the real world, threatening the values of “truth, goodness, and beauty” in knowledge [2]. Against this background, analyzing research on terminology and English translations of texts from the perspective of Transknowletology is conducive to promoting the construction of disciplinary autonomy for translation studies and holds significant practical importance for knowledge governance and cross-cultural communication in the era of globalization.

2. Research on Conceptual Elucidation

Yang Feng first explicitly defined in the Manifesto of Transknowletology: "Translation is a cultural behavior and social practice of cross-lingual knowledge processing, reconstruction, and re-dissemination" [1]. This formulation breaks through the dual framework of language and culture in traditional translation studies, establishing knowledge reproduction as the essential attribute of translation. Influenced by Foucault's archaeology of knowledge and Bakhtin's dialogic theory, this theory proposes the core proposition of "the dialogue between the locality and worldliness of knowledge." The author criticizes the past phenomenon in translation studies of "forgetting the substance due to preoccupation with utility, seeing the tool but losing the principle," emphasizing that the dialogue between the locality and worldliness of knowledge is the fundamental attribute of translation practice. Drawing on Foucault's archaeology of knowledge and Bakhti's dialogic theory constructs the theoretical foundation of Transknowletology [3, 4]. The manifesto particularly points out that knowledge possesses three dimensions: scientificity, sociality, and humanity, which enables translation studies to integrate natural sciences, social sciences, and humanities, becoming a "trans-discipline" or "meta-discipline." When facing the choice between translation as culture or knowledge, Yang Feng, through analyzing the essential differences between "culture" and "knowledge," establishes knowledge as the core of the translation noumenon. He states that "knowledge is all the existence of translation and the purpose of translation's existence" [5]. This assertion fundamentally clarifies the research object of Transknowletology and provides a new analytical dimension for translation studies.

As of August 1, 2025, a search of the keyword "Transknowletology" in the China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI) database, filtered from 2021 to 2025, retrieved 737 documents across the entire database. These include: 413 academic journal articles; 260 dissertations (31 doctoral dissertations, 229 master's theses); 13 conference papers (12 domestic conferences, one international conference); 4 newspaper articles; 2 books; 25 academic collected papers; and 20 feature journal articles. Regarding the annual publication volume, the total number of publications on Transknowletology is substantial overall, showing steady year-on-year growth, particularly between 2021 and 2023. Although the number of publications has declined in the last two years (2024-2025), the total remains significant. Transknowletology was proposed by Yang Feng in 2021 in his article Manifesto of Transknowletology [1]. The manifesto defines translation as "a cultural behavior and social practice of cross-lingual knowledge processing, reconstruction, and re-dissemination." Regarding source categories, CSSCI journals constitute the most significant proportion, followed by Peking University Core journals, with AMI and WJCI accounting for relatively more minor shares. Over the past five years, scholarly research on Transknowletology has received considerable attention, fully demonstrating the vigorous development trend in this field.

3. Research on Applied Translation

From the perspective of Transknowletology, applied translation studies have gradually become a crucial bridge for interdisciplinary communication. Transknowletology focuses on linguistic transfer and emphasizes the dissemination and transformation of knowledge across different cultures, disciplines, and social contexts. In recent years, research on the translation of legal and educational terminology has made significant progress in this field, becoming an important area of practice for Transknowletology. Translating legal terminology involves the cross-cultural transmission of legal knowledge, while translating educational terminology concentrates on the international dissemination of educational concepts and practices. Translating these two types of terminology requires precise linguistic conversion and consideration of the acceptability and adaptability of knowledge within the target culture.

Through the lens of Transknowletology, researchers can better understand the cultural differences, knowledge reconstruction, and complexities of interdisciplinary communication in terminology translation, thereby promoting the international development of the legal and educational fields. The translation of proper nouns is not merely a transfer at the linguistic level but also a cross-cultural transmission and reconstruction of knowledge. "Transknowletology posits that the cornerstone of translation, which 'positions the world,' is 'knowledge'" [6]. It emphasizes that translation is a process of knowledge reproduction and dissemination, requiring the accurate transmission of knowledge within complex contexts. This theoretical perspective provides a new epistemological framework for examining terminology translation. In his analysis of the contextual principles in legal terminology translation, Hu Bo, from the perspective of Transknowletology, analyzed the English translation of ruling of law. Early translations, such as "ruling the country by law," though straightforward, failed to convey the connotation of the supremacy of law; whereas "law-based governance," through its concise form, both preserves the legal authority of the source language and aligns with English expression conventions. Hu Bo pointed out that from a linguistic perspective, accuracy, consistency, conciseness, and professionalism are criteria for examining legal terminology at the lexical level [7]. Zhang Shengxiang argued that "as 'porters' of knowledge, translators need not only the skills to convert knowledge but also a kind of knowledge beyond technical rationality, namely, knowledge about knowledge" [8], which reflects the dynamic balance in the communicative context. The context principle manifests in vertical macro, meso, and micro levels, as well as in the horizontal communicative context, providing insights into how to translate terminology accurately. Furthermore, terminological differences between different legal systems are significant. For instance, "hypothecate" in civil law systems versus "mortgage" in standard law systems require clarity regarding the legal system background during translation to avoid confusion. This distinction between legal systems highlights the constraining role of macro-context on terminology translation. In practice, the role of textual context in the translation process cannot be overlooked. For example, "stay" in legal English is often mistranslated as stay, but its professional meaning is actually staying of proceedings, which requires accurate judgment based on the context. Similarly, "common law" in specific collocations (such as "common thief") cannot be simply translated as common but requires context-dependent professional expressions like habitual thief based on the textual context. This micro-level contextual analysis ensures the precise transmission of terminological meaning.

Song Xiaozhou et al. argued that to explore how an educational term should be translated into Chinese, one must "seek truth through knowledge" from the perspective of Transknowletology, which requires first grounding the discussion in the actual content of the English term itself and its developmental context [9]. Taking "liberal education" as an example, its origins in ancient Greece emphasize "breadth" and "refinement," translating liberal education more aligned with its historical connotations. In contrast, free education can easily evoke class associations and deviate from the original meaning. Conversely, "general education" is widely accepted in China as general education because it aligns with modern concepts of educational equality and resonates with traditional Chinese cultural values of extensive learning and understanding [9]. This difference reflects the filtering effect of the local context on disseminating terminology: when a translated term aligns with the values and practical needs of the target culture, it is more readily accepted and popularized.

Within the framework of Transknowletology, applied translation research demonstrates its unique value and importance in the translation practices of legal and educational terminology. The translation of legal terminology, through applied translation strategies, achieves precise transmission and cultural adaptability of legal knowledge across different legal systems, ensuring the authority and comprehensibility of legal texts in cross-cultural contexts. The

translation of educational terminology, employing applied translation methods, facilitates the international dissemination of educational concepts while accommodating cultural sensitivity and the diversity of educational practices. Both, based on linguistic transfer, deeply consider the reconstruction and acceptability of knowledge across different cultural and disciplinary backgrounds, providing robust support for the international development of the legal and educational fields.

4. Comparative Translation Study

Comparative translation study can also be regarded as an important branch of Transknowletology. It reveals the mechanisms of knowledge reconstruction and cultural transmission in the translation process by comparing the translation strategies, linguistic styles, and cultural adaptability of different translated versions. In recent years, with the interdisciplinary development of translation study, comparative translation study has gradually shifted from simple text comparison to in-depth analysis of the culture, society, and knowledge dissemination behind translation. Taking *The Three-Body Problem* and *Wen Fu (The Art of Literature)* as examples, these two works demonstrate different translation strategies and cultural adaptability during their translation processes, providing rich case studies for comparative translation research. Yang Feng used the vivid metaphor of “breaking the cocoon and becoming a butterfly” to illustrate the dialectical process of knowledge in cross-lingual transformation--it is both the “death” of source language knowledge and the “rebirth” of target language knowledge. This creative expression provides a novel theoretical perspective for understanding the dynamic nature of Transknowletology. Furthermore, by analyzing the differences between “factual knowledge” and “logical knowledge,” he further refined the epistemological framework of Transknowletology. In particular, the proposition that “humans live in a world of knowledge rather than a physical world” elevates Transknowletology to an ontological level, a milestone significance for the discipline construction of Transknowletology [10] and this perspective emphasizes that translators need to balance the knowledge noumenon’s accurate transmission with the target culture’s cognitive adaptability, achieving the cross-cultural transformation of knowledge value through specific translation strategies. The English translation of *The Three-Body Problem* trilogy is a typical case in science fiction translation. Jin Shengxi and Li Haoyu used a corpus-based multidimensional analysis method to systematically compare the stylistic differences between the two translators, Ken Liu and Joel Martinsen [11]. The study found that Ken Liu’s translation exhibits distinct “knowledge cross-lingual adaptation characteristics.” He employed creative strategies to handle culture-specific items, such as translating “sophon” (blending the root “soph-” with the suffix “-on”), which preserves the scientific nature of the concept while conforming to English word formation habits. This approach reflects the “worldizing reconstruction of local knowledge” emphasized by Transknowletology. In contrast, Martinsen’s translation tends towards a “knowledge world-sharing” model, achieving precise knowledge transmission through extensive use of modifying clauses and passive structures (an average of 40 past participle phrases as attributes per chapter) but potentially at the expense of some literariness (*ibid.*). This difference essentially reflects the translators’ different trade-offs between knowledge dissemination efficiency and aesthetic experience. It is worth noting that the translators’ stylistic differences are also evident in their narrative strategies. Ken Liu skillfully uses a narrative mode of “third person + public verb past tense” and frequently employs present participle absolute clauses to enhance descriptive vividness, whereas Martinsen prefers to integrate detailed information through the comprehensive use of various clauses (*ibid.*). These choices of linguistic features are not only matters of stylistic preference but also external manifestations of the translators’ attitudes towards knowledge: the former focuses on creating

an immersive reading experience, while the latter pursues the systematicity of knowledge transmission.

In the translation of classical literary theory, studying English translations of *Wen Fu* (The Art of Literature) is also instructive. Based on the “truth, goodness, and beauty” standards of Transknowletology, Huang Qin and Zhao Qiulei conducted a comparative analysis of the translations by Chen Shixiang (Chen Shih-hsiang) and Achilles Fang. Chen’s translation adopted a domesticating strategy for culture-loaded terms. For example, translating poetry as “The Lyric” with added transliteration notes, and translating the four seas idiomatically as “the whole world,” ensures knowledge accuracy (truth) while considering reader acceptability (goodness), and simultaneously achieves aesthetic reproduction (beauty) through poetic language. This multidimensional balance embodies the translation ethics advocated by Transknowletology: “seeking knowledge with truth, establishing meaning with goodness, and composing writing with beauty.” In contrast, Fang’s translation adhered to a foreignizing strategy, such as literally translating “Shih” and “the four seas.” While it excelled in knowledge fidelity (truth), it was slightly weaker in cultural adaptability and aesthetic effect. In-depth analysis reveals that the differences between the two translators stem from their different translation philosophies. Chen Shixiang upheld the concept of “poetic translation,” advocating for the transformation of Chinese literary theory into forms familiar to Western readers, such as prose poetry, which is closely related to his academic goal of promoting the “lyrical tradition of Chinese literature” [12]. From the perspective of Transknowletology, when local knowledge is highly systematic and culturally specific, excessive domestication may lead to knowledge loss. Achilles Fang, however, insisted on a philological fidelity view of translation, emphasizing the presentation of the original text’s heterogeneity through detailed annotations. It is evident that different translation philosophies lead to different knowledge outputs and consequently different translated versions.

As an important component of Transknowletology, comparative translation studies provide profound theoretical and practical perspectives on cross-cultural knowledge dissemination. Comparative translation studies reveal the complex mechanisms of knowledge reconstruction and cultural transmission during the translation process by comparing the translation strategies, linguistic styles, and cultural adaptability of different translated versions. From a broader perspective, these cases reveal several key mechanisms of Transknowletology: Firstly, knowledge migration inevitably accompanies formal transformation, as seen in the scientific terms in *The Three-Body Problem* and the literary concepts in *Wen Fu*, which need to be re-anchored within the English system. Secondly, knowledge reconstruction is constrained by target context norms, such as the requirement for logical explicitness in English academic discourse, influencing the textual strategies of *Wen Fu* translations. Finally, knowledge dissemination produces value-added effects, such as the science fiction craze triggered by *The Three-Body Problem* translations in the English-speaking world, surpassing the original work’s regional influence. Facing academic queries about the “vagueness of the definition of knowledge” [13], Yang Feng systematically demonstrated the essential characteristics of knowledge as “consciousized, symbolized, and structured information tools.” This definition responds to criticism and delineates a clear theoretical boundary for subsequent research [6]. It is noteworthy that the power relations in Transknowletology cannot be ignored. When Chinese science fiction concepts enter the English-speaking world, they must adapt to the existing power structure of scientific discourse. Similarly, the dissemination of classical Chinese literary theory in the West is inevitably influenced by Sinological research paradigms. This power interaction can lead to creative transformation of knowledge and a certain degree of “cognitive domestication.” Therefore, the ideal translation strategy should respect target language norms while preserving the uniqueness and innovativeness of the source language

knowledge, building bridges of cross-cultural understanding through annotations, paratexts, and other means.

5. Conclusion

Yang Feng and Li Siyi pointed out that the golden rule of Transknowletology is “truth, goodness, and beauty.” Knowledge is the “Archimedean point” of translation studies; as all the existence of translation, it is not only the theory but also the translation method [14]. In essence, it creatively integrates Chinese and Western philosophical wisdom, connecting the Confucian concept of “zhonghe” (equilibrium and harmony), the Daoist idea of “chong qi wei he” (the blending of vital forces creates harmony), and the three critical philosophies of Kant from the West, achieving “seeking knowledge with truth, establishing meaning with goodness, and composing writing with beauty” [1]. This methodology of “maintaining the mean to achieve harmony” effectively resolves the binary oppositions between scientism and humanism, domestication and foreignization in traditional translation studies, providing a “golden rule” for Transknowletology practice that possesses philosophical depth and operational practicality. Through research on applied translation and comparative translation from the perspective of Transknowletology, Transknowletology has developed from a theoretical conception into a mature discipline with methodological self-consciousness, offering a Chinese approach for its participation in the construction of the global knowledge system. In this era of rising AI, our reflection on the essence of translation--“has human civilization reached a dangerous age of ‘seeking truth’ or ‘seeking existence’?”--connects the study of Transknowletology with contemporary philosophy of technology. By integrating traditional Chinese “zhongyong” (doctrine of the mean) wisdom with Western critical theory, the research on this theory provides an example for constructing a translation theory discourse with Chinese characteristics.

The rise of Transknowletology has provided a new theoretical perspective for translation studies and brought profound insights into the practice of cross-cultural knowledge dissemination. Through the analysis of applied and comparative translation, we can see the close connection between the theory and practice of Transknowletology. In the field of applied translation, research on the translation of legal terminology and educational terminology demonstrates how Transknowletology addresses the dual challenges of cultural adaptability and knowledge accuracy in specific practices. These studies not only reveal the complexities in terminology translation but also emphasize the crucial role of the translator in knowledge reconstruction. In comparative translation studies, through the comparative analysis of different translated versions, Transknowletology further demonstrates the dynamic mechanisms of knowledge reconstruction and cultural transmission during translation. Whether it is the translation of science fiction like *The Three-Body Problem* or classical literary theory like *Wen Fu*, both exemplify the balance Transknowletology strikes between knowledge fidelity, cultural adaptation, and aesthetic representation. These studies have enriched the theoretical connotations of Transknowletology and provided concrete operational frameworks for translation practice. However, the development of Transknowletology still faces many challenges, such as maintaining the uniqueness of source language knowledge while respecting target language norms and ensuring the values of “truth, goodness, and beauty” in translation activities against the backdrop of rapidly developing AI technology. Resolving these issues requires further interdisciplinary research and practical exploration.

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