

A Brief Study on Translation of News from the Perspective of Functional Equivalence Theory

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Abstract: In today's society, news is an important means of international and domestic information dissemination. So the importance of news translation has become increasingly prominent. This article takes the functional equivalence theory proposed by the outstanding American translation theorist Eugene A. Nida as the principle of news translation, and briefly analyzes the stylistic characteristics of news, the essence and particularity of news translation, the strategies of news translation, and the guiding significance of functional equivalence theory for news translation.

1. Introduction

With the rapid development of economic and trade globalization, China is constantly accelerating its integration into the international community. As a special form of writing, news plays a crucial role in understanding of the new international situation for Chinese people, promoting economic, scientific, technological, and cultural exchanges with other countries and regions from all over the world, and promoting the prosperity and development of China's journalism industry. Similarly, Chinese people can also know things from all over the world through news from foreign media. So it is critical to complete a good news translation. This thesis is based on functional equivalence theory to briefly analyze its application in news translation.

2. About Functional Equivalence Theory

Taking the perspective of linguistics and the essence of translation into consideration, Nida, a famous American linguist, puts forward the famous translation theory. He establishes the conversion standard between the source language and the target language and reduces the differences. In the functional equivalence theory, he points out that "Translation is to represent the information from the source language." It is the most appropriate, natural and equivalent way to translate by using the functional equivalence theory from the perspective of semantics and stylistics. Translation conveys the surface information of vocabulary and conveys profound cultural information. The equivalence in dynamic equivalence includes word equivalence, grammatical equivalence, text equivalence and style equivalence. In these four aspects, Nida thinks that "Meaning is the most important, followed by form."

Translators should obey the three steps when they use functional equivalence theory in their translation. They can achieve the best translation. First of all, the translators should try their best to provide translation materials. Second, the translators can randomly give up formal equivalence if there exists some tough questions. Third, the writer finds that changing the form is still insufficient to express the meaning and culture features of the original text during the translation practising period of the writer.

3. The Features of News

News reports served as one of the most influential mass media, they not only transmit news, but also spread views[1]. News is a way of disseminating information through different media channels, as well as a literary style that records society, spreads information, and reflects the times.

A standard news item must consist of five parts: headline, lead, the main body, background, and

conclusion. The headline, lead, and the main body are the main parts that make up a piece of news, while the background and conclusion are auxiliary parts of a news. Therefore, for a standard news, the headline, lead, and the main body are essential. Headlines are the eyes of news, usually including citations, headlines, and subheadings. The vocabulary using in headlines must be concise but needs to attracts readers' attention. Lead summarizes the core content of the news in the simplest and most concise language, which is enough to give readers a general understanding of the news. The main body is the main part of the news, which uses vivid language to explain the entire process of the occurrence and development of an event, as well as background analysis. Background refers to the social and natural environment in which news occurs. The purpose of news is to truthfully reflect important events at every moment, so news places great emphasis on authenticity. There are also many characteristics of news, such as openness, authenticity, timeliness, accuracy.

4. The Essence and Particularity of News Translation

Translating consists in reproducing in the receptor language the closest natural equivalent of the source-language message, first in terms of meaning and secondly in terms of style[4]. The basic principle of translation is to be faithful to the original text and easy for readers to understand. What is faithful to the original text? Firstly, the translator needs to fully convey the content of the original text. Secondly, the translator needs to faithfully display the style of the original work, and finally, the translator needs to accurately reflect the meaning of the original work. The most difficult task is to let readers easily understand and grasp its central idea because translator need to eliminate the cultural barrier and so on between two languages.

News translation should comprehensively reflect the characteristics of news. In order to get a translation with accurate content that combines form and spirit, translators must make a profound study in the style of the original text and reflect its style in the translation. Therefore, during the translation process, in addition to faithfully conveying the meaning of the original text, expressing the views, attitudes, emotions, and thoughts of the original text, the translator should also strive to make the translation conform to the style of the original text, conveying the literary charm of the original text. News translation is an important bridge and necessary link in the process of news dissemination. Translators should accurately express news content in order to better play the role of a communication medium. For the translation of news as a special genre, Nida's "dynamic equivalence" translation criterion is more applicable. Nida's theory of "dynamic equivalence" includes two aspects: ideological content and formal style.

The connotations of "functional equivalence" and "dynamic equivalence" are basically the same, based on the reader's response as the testing standard, aiming to make the translated readers have the same or maximum similar psychological reactions as the original readers[2]. Therefore, translators should identify various effective means of expression to express the information in the original text in a way that is easiest for the target readers to understand. Translators should pay attention to the following points when translating: 1) The translated text need to be faithful to the content of the original text; 2) The genre of the translated text is consistent with the original text; 3) The translated text need to get a high acceptance of readers; 4) What kind of environment will the translation be used for?

5. Strategies in News Translation

Nida's functional equivalence theory points out that translators need to strive to follow the principles of lexical equivalence, syntactic equivalence, and textual equivalence in the translation process. Similarly, when translating news into English, translators should also follow the above three principles. Only in this way can the central idea of the original text be accurately conveyed and the cultural differences between the original text and the translated text be minimized.

5.1 Lexical Equivalence in News Translation

Throughout history, the differences in cultural backgrounds and thinking habits between China and the West have been important factors affecting vocabulary translation in various translated texts.

On the one hand, news translation must adhere to the basic principles of translation, namely “faithfulness and smoothness”. On the other hand, news translation also reflects the characteristics of personality[6]. In order to demonstrate the characteristics of accurate and timely reporting new things, the translator must be based on the correct translation of news vocabulary and always adhere to the principle of “functional equivalence”. Otherwise, it not only fails to convey information, but it may easily lead to misunderstandings and jokes.

We can use literal translation in news translation because it is a statement of fact. For example, if we simply use “the question of life and death” to express the meaning of “vital importance”, it may be too casual to provide such a translation. Readers may not read smoothly and have difficulties in understanding. At this point, the translator must choose to abandon the method of literal translation and use free translation to handle it. After free translation, the translated text expresses the same vivid effect as the original text and uses idiomatic English. During translation, translators can not mechanically translate word to word but need to connect with the context. They ought to have a general understanding of the overall meaning of the sentence, and then do translation. This is the specific application of the principle of functional equivalence in news English translation.

The form of four-character words in Chinese is compact in structure, neat in form, and catchy. Facing loose structures and difficult meanings to express in news sentences translation, translators can boldly use four-character words in Chinese, which can achieve good results. At this point, the translator can use the method of translating the original text into four-character words, which can achieve clear meaning, neat structure, strong rhythm, and express the same vivid effect as the original text.

5.2 Syntactic Equivalence in News Translation

The principle of “functional equivalence” also applies to the English translation of news sentences. In the process of news translation, translators must constantly enrich their comprehensive knowledge. Translators need to strive to improve their professional and scientific literacy, proficiently master and flexibly apply translation methods and techniques in news to ensure the continuous improvement of translation quality.

News in English sentences have a large amount of information and a compact structure, but Chinese sentences have a relatively loose structure. Due to cultural and sentence structure differences between English and Chinese, translators can use a multitude of Chinese sentences to express the information and the original meaning provided by only one English sentence. That is to divide the English sentence into many short sentences.

Example: At least 151 people were killed and 82 others injured in a stampede accident that occurred Saturday night at Itaewon, a district of the Republic of Korea’s capital Seoul, during a Halloween gathering, local authorities said early Sunday morning.

This sentence has three meanings in total: 1. The location of the stampede accident was in the Longshan District of Seoul, South Korea, the occurrence time was on Saturday night; 2. The reason for the stampede accident was due to the Halloween rally; 3. The stampede accident resulted in relatively serious casualties. The three meanings in this sentence all have relative independence, so it is a good idea to be narrated separately in three short sentences in translation.

It is not difficult to find that in the process of translation, if the translator is too rigid in form equivalence, it will make it difficult for the target readers to understand the central idea of the original text. Because of the differences of expression habits between Chinese and English, the translator can not translate every sentence in order[3]. At the same time, it will cause the translation to be difficult to understand or cumbersome in form. Therefore, during the translation process, the translator can boldly adjust the sentence structure and use various translation techniques to present the true meaning of the original text in the translation, in order to better achieve functional

equivalence.

5.3 Discourse Equivalence in News Translation

A discourse consists of a complete utterance[5]. News discourse not only emphasizes facts and clear expression, but also emphasizes the beauty and charm of language. Therefore, various rhetorical devices are often used to increase the readability and attractiveness of news. The use of various rhetorical devices reflects the discourse characteristics of news language. During translation, it is necessary to adhere to the principle of “functional equivalence”, so that the translation can not only convey the original meaning, but also maintain the original style as much as possible.

Example: We will promote the recovery of consumption. We will promote income growth to encourage consumer spending will and ability. We will support the recovery and development of food and beverage, brick and mortar shopping, culture, domestic services, and other consumer services, and promote the integration of online and offline consumption. We will encourage automobile consumption and take strong measures to address the shortage of parking spaces.

The example retains form equivalence and discourse correspondence compared to the original text. The functional equivalence theory can preserve the original information without affecting the translation. In the translation process, achieving formal equivalence alone is not enough, but it is also impossible to achieve complete equivalence between the translated text and the original text in all aspects. Translators can break the limitations of functional equivalence theory and adopt the optimal method for translation. Theoretical guidance is important, but providing high-quality translation is even more important than obeying translation theory. The translator also used parallelism in translation to reflect the beauty of rhythm. Translators can achieve discourse equivalence through this approach.

6. The Guiding Significance of Functional Equivalence Theory on News Translation

6.1 Grasping Cultural Differences and Using Equivalent Vocabulary

For news translation or any translation activities, the first thing to the translator is to understand the original text. Based on a thorough understanding of the original text, translators can search for cultural differences between the original text and the translated text. Translators should have a deep understanding of the culture in the context of the translated text. How can translators choose appropriate vocabulary to correspond to the original text after grasping cultural differences.

At present, different kinds of media groups tend to release amazing news combined with advertisement and public relations to attract more readers in order to enlarge their influence. That kind of behavior can be expressed in “media hype”. But some translators use “media fry” to replace “media hype”. It is not a decent translation produced by a professional translator. So it is important to get the real meaning of expressions and choose the best words to translate them.

At the same time, it is necessary to remind translators to pay special attention to “false friends” in translation, which are words or expressions that are literally equivalent but have vastly different meanings. The translation of busboy is a vivid example. If translators translate “busboy” into “a boy who sales tickets on a bus” for not doing enough research before translation, that will cause readers having a false understanding. So the correct meaning of “busboy” is “a boy in a restaurant to do some handy job”.

6.2 Breaking through Traditional Translation Forms

The characteristics of news determine that the translation of vocabulary beyond comprehension cannot be in the form of footnotes like literary works, and appropriate explanations must be organically integrated into the entire translation. When translators need to add explanatory text to the news translation, the most commonly used form is to use appositive structures or add attributives before and after the words that need to be explained. That can make appropriate supplementary explanations. There are varying degrees of differences in time and place of use, audience, and especially cultural characteristics between the original text and the translated text. In

order to maximize the “functional equivalence” between the translated text and the original text, the translator must add necessary explanations without affecting the meaning of the original text. During news translation, translators should refer to the language and cultural background of the translated text, placing themselves in the position of the readers of translated text.

Let us take “Pudong Development Zone, the big economic zone in the eastern part of Shanghai, China” as an example. Shanghai residents and even all Chinese people are familiar with it, but for foreigners, they may not be familiar with China’s administrative divisions. So in news translation, it is necessary to add appropriate explanations. It is a good way to deal with news expressions in the method of “literal translation+supplementary explanation” in English.

When translating, if the translator cannot find equivalent words, then it is necessary to abandon the original text and adopt the method of free translation. In Nida’s words, it means making necessary changes in word meaning and syntax.

6.3 Respecting Cultural Differences and Preserving Cultural Characteristics

While emphasizing the importance of translating in a form that is easily acceptable to readers, we cannot forget the fact. That is: translators are both translating and conveying different cultures. Therefore, when translating foreign news to domestic readers, translators should appropriately retain the foreign flavor in the original news articles. For example, “white collar workers” refers to those people who have high salaries in foreign countries. So when translators need to translate that kind of expressions into Chinese, it is a better way to find an expression with Chinese characteristics so that Chinese people can have a better understanding on it.

When translating Chinese news to foreigners, it is necessary to maintain Chinese culture as much as possible. If we need to translate a piece of news report about the customs that people have in commemorating their ancestors, we can directly use “Customs in Tomb Sweeping Festival” as the title of the news to let the foreign readers to know what the news report is about. Tomb Sweeping Festival is an important traditional festival in China. During translation, it is necessary to express the core meaning of it in English, that is tomb-sweeping. Translator does not use literal translation to deal with the words with strong Chinese culture. Translating into Tomb Sweeping Festival emphasizes the important custom of it. It is easy for foreigners to understanding the general background information of this festival.

7. Conclusion

This article explores the strategies and guiding significance of news translation under the guidance of Nida’s functional equivalence theory. As a major form of mass media, news presents certain newly occurring facts in a way that attracts readers’ attention as much as possible. This article proves through a series of examples that in news translation, translators need to adhere to the functional equivalence theory, and mainly compare and analyze the original text and the translated text from three main aspects: lexical equivalence, syntactic equivalence, and textual equivalence. Based on the translation purpose of news discourse, translators should maximize the consistency and functional similarity between the original text and the original text by applying a series of translation techniques. Translators should also strive to accurately and vividly convey the information of the original text in a way that is more in line with the expression habits of the translated text in order to obtain a translation that is consistent with the original effect and achieve the most ideal dissemination effect. There is no absolutely perfect or impeccable translation theory. Although Nida’s functional equivalence theory has certain limitations, this study provides a new perspective for translators in news discourse translation.

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