Research on News Translation From an English-Chinese Comparative Perspective

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Abstract

The divergent historical development and customs of Eastern and Western civilizations have led to differences in language, culture, and cognitive paradigms. This paper conducts a comprehensive analysis of the Chinese translation of "Paranoid Politics Goes Viral" in *The New York Times*, from the perspective of English-Chinese comparison. The analysis covers the lexical and sentence structures level of both languages, including part of speech, connotative words, hypotaxis and parataxis, active and passive voice, topic structure, and cognitive disparities. To address these differences, it is essential to avoid untranslatability and non-equivalence arising from cultural distinctions. Selecting appropriate translation strategies becomes crucial in order to fully utilize the strengths of the target language and accurately convey information to the readers in the target language.

Key words: English-Chinese comparison; News translation; Language disparities; Translation strategy

INTRODUCTION

Every culture is accompanied by a unique language, serving as the cornerstone that records not only its cultural essence but also bestows distinctive features upon it. Language represents the historical sedimentation of thought, reflecting the cognitive paradigm of a nation. In essence, languages not only preserve the cultural traditions of respective nations but also harbor their behavioral and cognitive patterns. English and Chinese each possess their own distinct features. Consequently, English-Chinese translators must diligently explore the differences between these two languages, particularly in terms of vocabulary, sentence structure, and other nuances.

Translators require focused efforts to enhance their translation skills and identify personalized translation strategies (Gu, 2020). In the realm of translation practice, particularly when translating news articles, every translator must carefully consider how to circumvent non-equivalence stemming from cultural disparities between China and the West. The objective of a news report is to accurately and swiftly convey information, and as such, it must be grounded in facts. This paper provides an in-depth comparative analysis of various aspects in both English and Chinese. Additionally, it will conduct a meticulous analysis using the following translation examples.

LEXICAL LEVEL

In English-Chinese translation, differences in culture, historical background, and ideological concepts can give rise to misunderstandings during the translation process. This may hinder the ability to conduct a profound analysis of the main content conveyed by the author or the article, resulting in a certain degree of ambiguity (Che, 2023).

Part of speech

In English, the same meaning can often be expressed using different parts of speech, providing a flexibility that Chinese lacks due to its limited variations in parts of speech. As a result, the linguistic form of English is more flexible than that of Chinese. When translating from English to Chinese, translators often need to adjust the part of speech based on the specific context to convey

the meaning of the original text more authentically and fluently to the readers.

Example 1:

Source Text (hereafter referred to as ST): It appears to be highly transmissible.

Target Text (hereafter referred to as TT): 它似乎具有很高的传播能力。

Here, the translator translates "transmissible" from the original sentence as "传播能力" transforming the adjective into a noun. This vividly transforms the structure of the "be" verb combined with an adjective to express the quality of an object into a Chinese noun, making the meaning clearer and more explicit.

Example 2:

ST: After all, they themselves engaged in a concerted effort to politically weaponize the 2014 Ebola outbreak against Barack Obama, whose response was in reality smart and effective.

TT: 毕竟，他们亲自合力将2014年埃博拉疫情作为针对巴拉克•奥巴马的政治武器，实际上奥巴马的应对是明智而有效的。

In the sentence above, the author translates "politically weaponize" as "政治武器". If translated directly as "政治武器化", it would go against the language habits of the target readers, potentially distorting the author's intended meaning. The word transformation not only avoids awkwardness but also faithfully conveys the original information.

Example 3:

ST: It's true that Democrats are criticizing Trump's actions, suggesting that his refusal to accept responsibility for, well, anything is putting America at risk.

TT: 的确，民主党人在批评特朗普的举动，说他拒绝对任何使美国面临风险的事情承担责任。

The translator transforms "his refusal" by changing its part of speech, translating the noun in the original text into a verb in the target text. If original phrase is translated directly as "他的拒绝" without conducting part-of-speech conversion, it would be stiff and overly literal. The target language readers would find it hard to accept. The translator's skill to transform part of speech is not only necessary but also executed adeptly.

Connotative Words

The initial perception of translation among people is often limited to the conversion between two different languages. However, through continuous practice and research, it becomes apparent that translation is not merely a linguistic conversion but rather a significant human cultural activity (Fang, 2023). As cultural exchange between the East and the West becomes increasingly close, language undeniably plays a pivotal role in intercultural communication. Constrained by cultural contexts, English and Chinese face obstacles in cultural exchange, manifested in significant disparities in vocabulary usage. One of the most common phenomena

is the divergent understanding of the implicit meanings of words between the two languages. Chinese often understand words by associating themselves with hidden connotations, resulting in a multitude of meanings for the same words. However, Westerners frequently find it challenging to grasp the concealed meanings in Chinese. Therefore, a comparative analysis of English and Chinese prove particularly important.

Example 4:

ST: You can, for example, see some similar tendencies in Bernie Sanders's team.

TT: 比如，你看，伯尼•桑德斯的团队也有类似的趋势。

In the original sentence, "see tendency" can be used, but in Chinese, we do not express it in this way. Instead of translating it as "你可以在伯尼•桑德斯的团队中看到类似的趋势", it might be more fitting to translate it as "伯尼•桑德斯的团队也有类似的趋势". This translation aligns better with Chinese language habits.

Example 5:

ST: Covid-19 is a global phenomenon, with outbreaks ranging from South Korea to Italy.

TT: Covid-19是全球性现象，从韩国到意大利都爆发了疫情。

The translation renders the noun "outbreak" from the original text as "爆发了疫情" aligning with the verbal nominalization in the Chinese while faithfully conveying the original meaning. If "outbreak" is translated as "爆发" without the extended meaning, target sentence would be "从韩国到意大利都爆发了" with less fluency, deviating from Chinese traditional expressive habits. Hence, translators should adopt a flexible approach during the translation process, and decide the translation strategy based on the specific context rather than blindly pursuing "word-for-word equivalence" which could impair the fluency of the translation.

SENTENCE STRUCTURE

English and Chinese are two distinct linguistic systems with substantial differences in grammar. Moreover, the cultural environments in which English and Chinese exist differ significantly, leading to variations in the linguistic structures of the two languages. This discrepancy arises from the fact that language is constructed upon culture. (Wang, 2022).

Hypotaxis and Parataxis

English places an emphasis on hypotaxis, with sentences characterized by tightly integrated structures. Moreover, English sentences exhibit logical sequences, featuring an abundance of diverse conjunctions. To achieve hypotaxis, English frequently utilizes relative pronouns, prepositions, and conjunctions, which are typically integrated and connected, thereby giving rise to complex sentences that is both semantically and structurally hierarchical in

English. The language of the translation should be smooth and understandable. If the original text is clear and easy to understand, the translation should also strive to be clear and easy to understand.

In contrast, Chinese diverges from English by prioritizing parataxis. Specifically, conjunctions are often omitted or used sparingly in Chinese, with implicit meanings and linguistic logic embedded between the lines. Hence, Chinese structures are often loose, characterized by the frequent use of short sentences, subclauses, and flowing constructions. Therefore, when translating from English to Chinese, it is essential to make appropriate additions or omissions of conjunctions, relative pronouns, and prepositions from the original sentence. Additionally, it is necessary to adjust the sequence of clauses according to the temporal and logical order in Chinese, aligning with the linguistic logic of Chinese native speakers, as illustrated in the following example:

Example 6:

ST: And as the signs of climate catastrophe multiply, from wildfires in Australia to drought in California, climate denial has only strengthened its grip on the G.O.P.

TT: 尽管从澳大利亚大火到加州干旱的气候灾难迹象不断增加，共和党对气候变化的否认反而越来越坚决。

The conjunction "and" from the original text is omitted in the translation, allowing the inherent meaning and logical relationship to be implicit in the compact structure of the translation. The translation skill avoids verbosity and makes the translation concise and smooth. Generally, news elements can be categorized into such as individuals, locations, time, and impact, while other factors can be appropriately omitted. Therefore, during the process of translating news into Chinese, translators need to faithfully and concisely convey the information, providing accurate news content.

Active and Passive Voice

In news reporting, English often utilizes passive voice for two main reasons. 1) Objectivity: The use of passive voice can minimize subjective nuances, directing readers' attention more towards the event itself rather than the actor; 2) Conciseness: News reporting aims to convey as much information as possible within limited words.

As passive voice is generally more concise than active ones, the use of passive voice is preferred in news reporting. In Chinese, the convention is to use living entities as the subject, and this holds true in news reporting as well. Therefore, Chinese news reports often employ sentences with animate subjects.

Example 7:

ST: In today's case, analysis was skewed toward not seeing a threat — and the skew was enabled, in part, by claims that all the evidence that there was, indeed, a threat was a hoax perpetrated by the liberal news media.

TT: 对于目前而言，分析偏向于看不到威胁——令

这种倾向产生的部分原因是有人声称所有现存指向威胁的证据，肯定是由自由派新闻媒体炮制的骗局。

The subject in the original sentence is "analysis". In the translation process, if rendered literally in the passive voice as "分析被歪曲", it would deviate from the language habits of Chinese readers and hinder the effective understanding of information in news. English news reporting tends to be highly objective, resulting in the frequent use of the passive voice. While Chinese news reporting is also objective, it generally begins with a specific, meaningful subject. Although Chinese does have passive voices, translators seldom utilize passive voice to translate news. When translating from English to Chinese, it is common for translators to adjust the order of the subject-verb-object components, transforming passive voice in the original text into active voice in Chinese.

Topic Structure

The term topic structure refers to the thematic organization within a discourse. The treatment of topic structure differs in both languages. Chinese emphasizes parataxis, while English prioritizes hypotaxis. Consequently, Chinese is considered a language that highlights topics, while English is known for emphasizing subjects. To achieve a coherent and smooth translation, it is crucial to pay much attention to the switching properly of topics and subjects in English-Chinese translation.

Example 8:

ST: At first, it wasn't clear whether right-wing paranoia was also hampering the response to Covid-19.

TT: 右翼的偏执妄想是否也妨碍了Covid-19疫情的应对，在一开始还不是很明确。

The translation reproduces the information conveyed in the original text and affirms the linguistic characteristics of emphasizing the subject in English sentences. If the original text is translated word-for-word in sequence, the basic meaning of the sentence can be conveyed, but the translation appears somewhat rigid. For an improved translation, it is advisable to emphasize the topic-dominant characteristic in Chinese. This entails altering the order of subjects and topics, aligning with the Chinese readers' expectations and enhancing the fluency of the translation.

Example 9:

ST: On the eve of the 2018 midterms, a survey found 73 percent of Republican senators denying the scientific consensus that man-made climate change is happening.

TT: 在2018年中期选举前夕，一项调查发现，73%的共和党参议员否认一个科学共识，即人为导致的气候变化正在发生。

The latter part of this sentence is translated as "73%的共和党参议员否认人为导致的气候变化正在发生的科学共识" which suffers from a cumbersome structure caused by the extensive information in the latter part. There are distinctive characteristics in Chinese and English. Chinese tends to emphasize the topics, while English highlights the subject of a sentence. Translating

the sentence as "73%的共和党参议员否认一个科学共识，即人为导致的气候变化正在发生" is a better choice. With such a translation, readers can better capture the sentence, avoiding the drawback of an obscured theme due to excessive modifiers in the target language. This approach aligns with the reading habits of Chinese readers, giving rise to a smoother and more natural flow in the translation.

Cognitive Differences

Throughout history, there have been significant differences between Eastern and Western cultures in terms of living environments, customs, and other aspects. These disparities fundamentally shape distinct modes of thinking for individuals from both cultures. Simultaneously, the variations in thought processes also influence the linguistic systems of the two nations to a certain extent. Language serves as the medium for the generation and development of thought, and thought cannot flourish without language. The great differences in thinking are reflected through language, resulting in distinct speaking styles. Hence, it is imperative to recognize that translation is not only a linguistic conversion but also the transmission of cultural information (Liu, 2000).

Any language is the accumulation of the long-standing history and culture of its people. People from different cultures exhibit differences in social backgrounds, lifestyle customs, and modes of thinking, leading to distinctions in language expressions (He, 2006). Westerners tend to have more direct thoughts, while Chinese individuals often employ a more indirect and gentle manner of expression, avoiding explicitness in their speech. The latter not only conveys the intended meaning but also preserves the relationship between communicators. This difference in thoughts is reflected in sentence construction in both English and Chinese. English typically presents the key information at the beginning of the sentence, gradually adding secondary details. In contrast, the latter part of a Chinese sentence often holds the emphasis. This phenomenon is even more pronounced in news reporting, where Chinese tends to first provide minor details such as the reasons behind an event, saving the main theme for the end.

Example 10:

ST: It's all a hoax, a conspiracy by the liberal media to make Donald Trump look bad.

TT: 这一切都是自由派媒体为了使唐纳德•特朗普难堪的骗局。

From this example, we can conclude that an English sentence often leads with the core information directly—initially presenting the core information (conspiracy), followed by specifying the information's source (liberal media), and finally articulating the reason (to make Trump look bad). Conversely, Chinese typically begins by introducing the source of the information (liberal media), setting the stage for later expounding on the reason (to make Trump look bad), and finally revealing the core information (conspiracy). Therefore, in the process of English-Chinese translation, achieving accurate and logically coherent translations, and successfully conveying news information, requires a thorough understanding of the semantic nuances of both languages and leveraging their respective strengths.

CONCLUSION

Through comparing and analyzing the above sentences, we can conclude that the differences between English and Chinese stem from various reasons. These differences arise from the fact that every language is interconnected and serves as the carrier of its native cultural context, closely tied to the social and cultural environments in which it originates. Different languages, shaped by diverse cultural contexts, exhibit distinct characteristics, leading to variations in lexical semantics, lexical transformations, syntactic structure, and modes of expression. Therefore, when translating news, translators need to first rely on relevant background knowledge, analyze the features of the original text, clarify the logical connections between sentences, and then reorganize the translation according to the features of the target language. Only through this process can translators achieve a translation effect that fully conveys information while maintaining natural readability.

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