

A Study on the English Translation of News Headlines from the Perspective of Variational Translation Theory

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Abstract: *Based on the variational translation theory, this study selects the bilingual headlines of China Daily in 2023 as samples. From the perspective of the variational translation theory, this study analyzes the examples by using the three techniques of “adding”, “deleting” and “narrating” in the variational translation theory, and explores the application of the variational translation theory in the translation of news headlines, in order to provide new perspectives and ideas for the translation of news headlines.*

Keywords: Variational translation theory; News headlines; Translation.

1. Introduction

News communication is of great significance in China. It is not only an important way to transmit information and publicize policies, but also an important means to promote Chinese culture to go global. News headlines attract readers' attention and arouse their interest in reading through vivid language, novel vocabulary or unique expression. A good headline can make people at a glance at the news content and generate the impulse to read. The translation of news headlines needs to conform to the expression habits and grammar rules of the target language to make the translation more natural and smooth. This requires the translator to have a solid language foundation and rich translation experience, and be able to flexibly use translation skills to ensure the accuracy and readability of the translation. The translation of news headlines has an important influence on the effect of news communication. An accurate, vivid and attractive title can quickly attract readers' attention and improve the reading rate and dissemination effect of news. Therefore, the study on the English translation of news headlines is of great theoretical and practical significance.

Variational translation theory refers to the translation activities in which translators absorb the relevant content of the original text by means of adding, deleting, editing, narrating, condensing, integrating and altering according to the special needs of specific readers under specific conditions [1]. Translation is a thinking and language activity in which the translator converts the cultural information of the source language into the cultural information of the target language to meet the specific needs of the audience [2]. In the translation of news headlines, translators need to meet the specific needs of target readers, so that target readers can understand the central content of the whole news through the reading of news headlines. Translators need to give full play to their subjective initiative, extract the main information in the original text, integrate and arrange the translation, and transmit the original text information most effectively. This paper selects the bilingual news headlines of China Daily in 2023 as the research object, and analyzes the English translation of news headlines from the perspective of variational translation theory, in order to provide certain

references for the English translation of news headlines.

2. Variational Translation Theory

The variational translation theory is a native theory put forward by Huang Zhonglian. By studying Yan Fu's translation thoughts, Huang Zhonglian traces the origin of translation and defines the concept of variational translation theory. Variational translation refers to the translation activities in which the translator absorbs the relevant content of the original text by means of adding, deleting, editing, narrating, condensing, integrating and altering according to the special needs of specific readers under specific conditions [1]. Huang Zhonglian explains this definition in detail. First of all, the subject of transmutation is the translator, and the translator makes transmutation according to the needs; The purpose of translation modification is to adopt appropriate methods for the special needs of specific readers under specific conditions, not to satisfy all readers; The methods of modification and translation are to change the original text from a macroscopic perspective by means adding, deleting, editing, narrating, condensing, integrating and altering. Translation is an act of absorbing the original text. It is not a complete translation input like complete translation, but a translation that is effectively absorbed.

The object of variation is the relevant content of the original, not the whole content, indicating that the adaptation is the adaptation of the original. Generally speaking, transliteration is still a kind of translation activity, but transliteration and transliteration are corresponding to each other, not opposed to each other, and the two can coexist and complement each other, aiming at different needs and different groups of readers. This is a comprehensive definition and a scientific translation theory. The theoretical system of translation has theories, guiding ideology, methods (macro/micro research and operation) and practices, which highlights Huang Zhonglian's ideological system and methodology that focus on reality, analyze in detail, and be strategically located [3].

Variational translation theory corresponds to complete translation, even from the perspective of complete translation theory. With the coexistence, the two serve different readers

and face different needs. In the process of the development of the variational translation theory, Huang Zhonglian not only proposed seven alternative means, but also conducted in-depth research on variant translation from multiple perspectives, including the nature of variant translation, macro characteristics, and the application of parallel corpora. These studies provide a solid foundation for the development of translation theory. At the same time, variational translation theory has also received the attention and recognition of many scholars. Many scholars began to apply and study the theory extensively, which further promoted the development and perfection of the theory. For example, the paper discusses the characteristics and applications of the theory from various perspectives, such as literary translation, publicity translation, film and television subtitle translation and scientific and technological translation, and makes an in-depth study of the fidelity, regularity and subjectivity of the translator.

3. Variational Translation Theory and News Headlines Translation

In a certain sense, news is the most direct way to carry out cross-regional and cross-border communication and cognition, which also means the important value of news translation [4]. As the “eyes” of news reports, news headlines have the characteristics of timeliness, simplicity, concise sentence patterns and so on. News headlines are short words that summarize or evaluate the news content in front of the news text content. The most important role is to reveal, summarize and evaluate the news content, attract readers to read, and highlight the layout. News headlines use the most concise words to summarize the most important, the most core, the most fresh content in the news, to help readers quickly grasp the gist of the news. By reading the headline, readers can get a general idea of what the news is about without looking at the full text.

Secondly, the headline not only introduces the news content concisely, but also can table. The opinions and attitudes of writers, editors, and even the media as a whole. A good news headline has a distinct ideological nature, which can not only remind readers of the news content, but also help readers understand the nature and significance of the news content. In the face of the vast ocean of information, the audience has neither the time nor the energy to find valuable news, can be seen, the key depends on the title of the work. When making news headlines, we should not only consider suggesting and evaluating news facts to readers through headlines, but also be good at attracting readers to read news in novel forms. Therefore, translators should be quick, accurate and concise when translating news headlines.

Under the guidance of variational translation theory, translators need to learn how to choose and integrate information. News translators should have a high level of mutual translation between Chinese and English and understand the cultural differences between China and foreign countries [5]. Translators need to translate flexibly according to the cultural background, reading habits and specific needs of target readers, such as adding, subtraction, editing, describing, shrinking, combining and modifying seven flexible means of translation, so that the translated title can not only retain the core information of the original title, but

also meet the reading habits and aesthetic needs of target readers. News is often inseparable from culture, which requires translators to understand different cultures and be able to choose the original information with an accurate understanding of the original content. For example, when translating culturally distinctive words and professional terms, translators can supplement and explain the content by means of “adding”, or simply describe the translated text by means of “narrating”, so that readers can understand the original content more accurately. At the same time, translators can use the “deleting” workaround to delete redundant information and secondary information.

Variational translation theory emphasizes the translator’s subjective initiative. In the process of translation, translators need to give full play to their subjective initiative, have a deep understanding of the original text, and then deal with the original content according to the special needs of readers. The translator does not need to translate the original word for word, but has more power. This means that the translator is not only the transmitter of the original content, but also the interpreter, evaluator and disseminator of the original information in the process of translation. News headlines have significant characteristics in both content and form. For example, in today’s new media era, news headlines mostly contain popular words on the Internet. The purpose of news headlines is to attract readers’ interest in reading, and to be in line with The Times, close to readers’ lives, and enhance the dissemination of news. When translating network buzzwords, translators need to give full play to their subjective initiative and creativity. First, they should accurately understand the connotation of the buzzwords, then process the original content, and finally translate them in a way that is acceptable to the target and readers. In addition, translators should try their best to achieve the same communication effect as the original text.

4. The Application of Variational Translation Theory in News Headlines Translation

The quality of translation of news headlines directly affects the attractiveness and comprehensibility of the news itself to readers [6]. The translation of news headlines occupies an important position in news translation, because it directly affects readers’ initial understanding and interest in news content. News headlines should accurately convey the main content and spirit of the original text, and should not distort or omit key information. This requires the translator to choose the most appropriate words and expressions on the basis of understanding the original text to ensure the accuracy of the translation. Some professional terms or new words may appear in news headlines, and translators need to accurately understand their meanings and express them correctly in the translation. At the same time, for some words or phrases with special meanings, translators need to give appropriate explanations or explanations to ensure that readers can accurately understand them. When translating news headlines, translators need to choose the most general and representative words to express the meaning of the original text. This requires the translator to have a rich vocabulary and accurate word choice ability. The translation of news headlines needs to consider the differences between different cultures and readers’ acceptance of culture. Translators need to avoid

using words or expressions that may cause cultural conflicts or misunderstandings, so as to ensure the accuracy and acceptability of the translation in different cultural contexts.

To sum up, the translation of news headlines needs to pay attention to accuracy, conciseness, clarity, attractiveness and cultural sensitivity. By following these principles and norms, translators can ensure that the translation of news headlines is accurate and vivid, and meets both the norms of news writing and the reading needs of readers. The following is an analysis of the English translation of news headlines by seven techniques and discusses the specific application of the variational translation theory in news headlines translation.

4.1 Adding

“Adding” means to add information to the original [7]. Adding is not an arbitrary addition, but a necessary supplement to better convey the meaning of the original text on the basis of understanding the original text. There are significant differences in expression modes between English and Chinese, which should be fully taken into account when translating, so that the target text can be faithful to the original text and conform to the expression habits of the target language. In the process of adding, special attention should be paid to the correctness of grammar to avoid grammatical errors that may affect the quality of the translation. For the implied information in the original text or the content that needs to be commented, it can be clearly expressed in the translation by means of adding, so as to make the translation more complete and easy to understand.

Although adding helps to make the translation more complete and easy to understand, excessive additional translation can lead to lengthy translation, wordy translation, and even change the meaning of the original. Therefore, it is necessary to grasp the degree of translation and avoid excessive translation. In addition, the style and characteristics of the original text should be kept as much as possible. If the original text is concise and clear, the translation should be as concise and clear as possible; If the original text is vivid and specific, the translation should be as vivid and specific as possible. In addition, the reader's needs and background knowledge should be considered. For different groups of readers, it may be necessary to adopt different ways and degrees of translation. For example, for professional readers, it may be necessary to add more technical terms and background information; For ordinary readers, it may be necessary to explain the cultural connotation and detail description in more accessible language. Though the news title is mainly concise, it also needs to comprehensively and accurately summarize the main content of the news. When translating the news title, necessary information can be appropriately added to enhance the readability of the title.

Example 1:

“11月即将上映的海外精彩新片11月即将上映的海外精彩新片” (Chinadaily.com.cn 2023-10-26)

“4 of the best films to watch in November”

The original title only mentioned new films to be released, while the number of new films has been increased in the translation. Huang Zhonglian [7] proposed that there are three

ways to add, namely, explanation, commentary and writing, and writing refers to adding content related to the translated part. Here, the translator adopts the workaround of “writing” and adds the specific number of films “4” to the translation. This translation accurately and quickly conveys the important content of the news, indicates the specific number of films to be shown, supplements the background information, and makes the title more specific and complete. In addition, the translator uses digital expression in the translation to make the news content concrete, so that readers can quickly and accurately capture the specific information of the news. The numbers in the title provide intuitive and accurate information, giving readers a visual impact that can attract readers' interest in reading.

Example 2:

“研究：开怀大笑有助于心脏健康” (Chinadaily.com.cn 2023-08-28)

“The best medicine? Study finds laughter is good for heart health”

Here The translator adopts the technique of “adding” and adds the phrase “The best medicine?”. Combined with the news content, the Chinese headline only outlined the study's conclusion: “开怀大笑有助于心脏健康”, but the translation adds a translator's comment on the content. The original headline did not mention that “laughter” is the best medicine for heart problems, but combined with the overall news, the article repeatedly mentions the therapeutic effect of “laughter” in terms of heart health. The translator combines the news content and put forward her own evaluation in the title, indicating that “laughter” is the best medicine to treat heart disease. A commentary is a comment on what has been translated [1]. The translator's comments here reflect the importance of “laughter” for heart health, so that readers realize the value of “laughter” in heart health, so as to have a deeper understanding of the news content.

4.2 Deleting

Deleting refers to deleting information that target readers do not want, including dross or redundancies [1]. It is an important technique, which aims to eliminate redundant information in the original text and make the translation more concise and clear. In the process of deleting, it is necessary to follow the basic principles of keeping the original meaning unchanged and conforming to the target language habits, and pay attention to specific matters such as avoiding random deletion, omitting redundant information, paying attention to sentence structure and retaining key information. Deleting is not to delete the content of the original text at will, but to screen and refine the information of the original text reasonably according to the expression habits of the original text and the target language. In the process of deleting, it is necessary to avoid excessive or incorrect deletion of the original information, which may lead to incomplete meaning or deviation from the original text.

The quality and efficiency of translation can be improved by using the deleting technique properly. From the perspective of the translator, removing the information that the translator thinks the reader does not need is a choice of the original [8]. “Deleting” is a workaround that highlights valuable

information. The news title is the essence of the news, and the information it shows is condensed and essence. Therefore, when translating the news title, more than information should be appropriately deleted and the key points should be highlighted.

Example 3:

“11月全国CPI同比下降0.5% 中国物价总体保持平稳” (Chinadaily.com.cn 2023-12-11)

“China consumer prices drop in Nov”

Here, the translator uses the deleting to delete the superfluous information in the translation, and only retains the main information content. The article mentioned the specific range of CPI decline, and also made a brief comment on the current situation of Chinese prices. However, the translator summarized the main information of the news in only one sentence in the translation, so that the translation was concise and accurate. Information that is closely related to the original content needs to be retained, and details that do not fit well with the main information can be appropriately deleted. Information in this headline such as “0.5% decline” and “prices are generally stable” is out of line with readers' needs and can therefore be omitted.

Example 4:

“马来西亚知名经济学家:中等收入国家陷阱说是解释还是掩饰?” (Chinadaily.com.cn 2023-12-05)

“Middle-Income Country Trap?”

The contrast between the original and the translation is obvious. The original headline uses 26 Chinese characters to summarize the news content, while the translation only uses 4 English words. Here, the translator has subtracted relevant items that are not closely related to the main content of the news, including “well-known Malaysian economists” and “Explain or dissembled?”. Chinese title tends to be “comprehensive”, as far as possible to summarize the content complete; English titles, on the other hand, tend to be “focused”, only used to extract the important content. After reading the whole news, the translator has found that the theme of the whole news is around the “middle-income country trap”. Therefore, only the central idea of the news should be retained in the translation, and the rest should be omitted. This conforms to the reading habits of target language readers and helps them to capture key information.

4.3 Narrating

The definition of narrating is paraphrasing or retelling the content of an original work using the target language, not concentrating on words, but rather trying to convey the main ideas while ignoring the form of the original work [7]. Narrating requires that the main content of the original text be conveyed in one's own words. When paraphrasing the original text, keep it as literal as possible and don't add or subtract anything that might change the original meaning. And the translator should use simple and clear language to paraphrase, avoid using overly complex or vague vocabulary and sentence structure. If there is a specific term or jargon in the original quote, make sure to explain it clearly when paraphrasing it, or replace it with a more generic expression. The narrative can change the form of the original text, narrating or relaying the

main information of the original text. The translation of news headlines involves the conversion between different cultures and languages of the two countries, so it is necessary to narrate this kind of workaround to help the target readers better understand the main content contained in the headlines in a way that the target readers can understand.

Example 5:

“龙墩墩”来啦~ “冰墩墩”龙年新春特别版亮相” (Chinadaily.com.cn 2023-11-30)

“Chinese dragon version of Bing Dwen Dwen unveiled”

In the original text, there is the word “龙墩墩”, which is mentioned above as a more obvious feature of contemporary news headlines. When translating such words, it is more appropriate to choose the flexible means of narrating. The word “龙墩墩” does not have an accurate equivalent in English, and there is an official translation of “冰墩墩”, which is translated as “Bing Dwen Dwen”, and the translator here cleverly combines “龙墩墩” with the word “冰墩墩”, indicating that “龙墩墩” is the dragon year version of “Bing Dwen Dwen”. Because the word “Bing Dwen Dwen” is more influential, it is the mascot of the 2022 Beijing Winter Olympic Games and has an official translation, and the word “龙墩墩” is just a network buzzword derived from “Bing Dwen Dwen”. Therefore, the translator here uses the means described above to explain the specific meaning of the word “龙墩墩” in her own words instead of transliteration. In this way, the translation of network buzzwords can be easy to understand and more concise, and readers can better understand the translation.

Example 6:

“社区食堂”火了! 年轻人和老年人成为“饭搭子” (Chinadaily.com.cn 2023-10-23)

“No matter what your age, who can resist a tasty, low-priced meal?”

Here the translator adopts the “narrating” to summarize the main content of the news in a more concise and understandable way. There are many popular words in the original text, such as “社区食堂” and “饭搭子”. There is already a certain difficulty in translating network buzzwords, which are derived from China's network environment, and it is difficult for foreign readers to fully understand these words. The original intention of the community canteen is to open a canteen in the community, and the original intention is to solve the problem of eating for lonely elderly people living alone. This headline translates “社区食堂” as “a tasty, low-priced meal,” specifically explaining the meaning of community canteen. The translator changes the form and structure of the original sentence, captures the main information, and narrates the title in her own words.

5. Conclusion

As an important part of news report, news headlines play an important role in guiding readers, summarizing content and transmitting information. Under the background of globalization, the English translation of news headlines is particularly important. By studying the translation of bilingual news headlines of China Daily in 2023, we can see the

important role of variational translation theory in the translation of news headlines. The variational translation theory emphasizes the variant of translation and can guide the translator to choose the original text and integrate the information. Techniques such as “adding”, “deleting” and “narrating” can not only guide the translator to flexibly deal with the original information, but also make the translated title more in line with the reading habits and aesthetic needs of the target readers, so as to facilitate the target readers to better understand the main information of the news. The variational translation theory provides a new way of thinking for the translation of news headlines. Therefore, translators should pay more attention to the application and development of the theory in the translation practice of news headlines, so as to improve the translation quality of headlines and the communication effect of news.

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