

# English-Chinese News Headlines Translation from a Skopostheorie Perspective

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**Abstract**—In this informative society, newspaper, websites, broadcasts, TV, and magazines are all important media, which provide news to our daily life. Therefore people have the opportunity to view the events happened all over the world. People can get access to the news of everywhere in this world and regard them as their topic when talking with each others. How can a piece of news get out of others successfully? The headline is the most important elements of it. There are many studies about the translation of the news headline, but these studies are mainly focused on the features of the news headline and the skills of translation. This paper discusses how to express the original meaning of the news headlines according to the Skopostheorie and make the headlines localized as well as interesting, in order to grab the readers' attention.

**Index Terms**—news headlines, Skopostheorie, English-Chinese translation

## I. INTRODUCTION

In this modern society, news has become a very common thing in our daily life. We are confused by thousands of news and the information they are carrying as we are all exposed on this world where the massive information is surrounding. There is no doubt that some news is ignored as the amount of news we can read is too much. Therefore, a proper headline is the most important element which can be regarded as the only way to attract the target readers. The headline of the news must be interesting, dramatic and brief. Thus the readers can notice the news from others after seeing it.

Journalistic English is significant when the promotion of communication is concerned. With the gradual deepening of the opening policy and the other events happened these years, Chinese people are becoming more and more eager to keep in touch with the world. Translating of news stories from English media has become a daily-must for many people, which is widely regarded as a way to widen one's horizon so as a bridge for more information. Therefore, the translation of the English news is important as the people's desire. According to the above discussion, news headlines hold a key position. What is more, the language of newspaper headlines is the model of language that is intensively compact and cleverly designed to serve the major purposes of telling the news, drawing attention and establishing character. The news headline plays such an important role to light up the interest of the reader, so its translation should be concerned. However, not too many scholars and translators pay their attention to the news headline. The relevant research is far from enough.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The translation of English news headlines is to make the translated headlines perform the same functions in Chinese as those the original headlines performed in English. Thus an introduction to this theory is needed.

During the 1970s to 1980s, more and more scholars change their focus from strict linguistics to dynamic functionalism in translation studies. They are called the "Germany school" of functional theories of translation. From the perspective of functional theories, translation is conceived as a communicative act with an aim, whose end product is a text which is capable of functioning appropriately in specific situations and context of use. Skopostheorie is the most important theory of this school. Reiss and Vermeer play key roles in building of the theory and Christiane Nord's role is crucial for a further development of the Skopostheorie. (Baker, 2004) Based on the theory of action, Hans J Vermeer develops his general theory of translation called Skopostheorie. Breaking with traditional linguistic translation theory, Vermeer views translation as an intercultural action. It is not the transcoding of words or sentences from one language into another, but a complex action in which someone provides information about a text under new functional, cultural and linguistic conditions in a new situation. (Baker, 2004) In Vermeer's opinion, translation is a form of translational action based on a source text. Any action has an aim or purpose. So Skopostheorie is a theory of purposeful action. The essence of Skopostheorie is the principle that determines any translation process is the aim of the overall translation action (Nord, 2001). A translational action has various translation Skopos, related to each other in a hierarchical order and determine the translation strategies.

Skopostheorie was first introduced by Hans J. Vermeer. The main rule determining any translation process is the purpose of the overall translational action. (Nord 2001) We will look at the basic viewpoints of Skopostheorie and its Skopos rule in the following section.

Skopos is the Greek word for “purpose”. In Skopostheorie, Skopos is a term usually referring to the purpose of the overall translational action. The term Skopos usually refers to the purpose of the target text. (Nord, 2001) The prime rule for any translation is the Skopos rule, saying that a translational action is determined by its Skopos. (Nord, 2001). We can understand the decisive role of Skopos in a translational action in this way: Skopos is the dominant rule; it determines the course of the action. Skopos determines why the source text is translated in one way other than another, so it is the intention of the mode. Skopos is the goal of the translation process; so it is the function of the translation.

After expatiating upon the basic concepts of Skopostheorie, Vermeer further more advances the Skopos rule. Skopos rule is the top-ranking rule in Skopostheorie which says translational action is determined by its Skopos that is the ends justify the means. According to Nord, the Skopos rule has solved the eternal dilemmas of dynamic vs. formal equivalence, free vs. faithful translation, good interpreters vs. slavish translators, and so on, because all the strategies in translation depend on the purpose for which the translation is needed. (Nord, 2001).

Another important rule of the Skopostheorie is the coherence rule, which means that a translation should be acceptable in a sense that it is coherent with the receivers' situation. A communicative interaction can only be successful if the receivers interpret it as being sufficiently coherent with their situation. Fidelity rule is considered to be subordinated to intratextual coherence. Such a kind of fidelity is embedded in the very concept of translation in the Skopos theory. It concerns intertextual coherence between the translation and the source text.

In the theoretical framework of Skopostheorie, translation means producing another version of the pieces for the target readers or audience in the target language under the target cultural environment. Thus, the source text will be in the subordinating position (Nord, 2001). In other words, the source text is not in the central and authoritative position, but in an unbound system. It is only one of many information sources employed by the translator. One of the reasons why the translator chooses the source text as his object of translation is that he thinks much information in the source text can reach certain destination in the target cultural environment. Generally speaking, each translating action aims at a given purpose, and the translator achieves the destination as possible as he can by using all kinds of means.

In summary, the translating strategies are determined by the purpose and function of the translation. No matter what strategies to choose, it is of primary significance to achieve the concrete destination of translation effectively. Traditional translating comments fall in between empty admiration and concentrative error correction. The Skopostheorie provides a theoretical foundation and guidance for some translating strategies which disobey the traditional translating theories but is successful in guiding practical translating activities, especially in news headline translation. This causes more relevant experts to reevaluate those translating strategies which are not advocated traditionally but indispensable in practical translating activities from the perspective of function.

In light of all the above-mentioned, news headline translation sometimes can be astray from the traditional equivalent translation principles by following the reader-oriented translating theory if needed, which makes the translating strategies of adaptation and abridged translation possible and reasonable. Moreover, we also find theoretical guidance for those news headline translations which are unexplainable by the traditional translating theories.

### III. THE FEATURES AND FUNCTION OF THE NEWS HEADLINE

Now in this information age, media plays a significant role in people's daily life, There are different categories of news headlines in a broad sense, so news headlines fall into TV news headlines, radio news headlines, newspaper headlines, Internet news headlines and so on. In this day and age, newspapers and websites are both important news media. Both provide news to the public. Therefore, this paper will choose the headlines on newspapers, magazines and the headlines on the websites as examples.

#### A. *The Feature of News*

The journalistic language, which is a special category of language, has its features: concreteness--the description and narration of events or happenings claim concrete wording and details; accuracy--it is the lifeline of news, and inaccurate news is worthless; brevity--the timeliness of journalistic reporting and the limited space of news media require that news should be brief; popularity---journalistic languages are easily comprehensible to people of different educational levels; and likeliness---journalistic languages are vivid and touching. (Newmark, 2006)

Headlines in newspapers vary from one to another, whereas the formulation of news headlines has to meet fundamental requirements prescribed by journalistic conventions. The news headline has those features: Shortness: news headlines must always be downsized, with redundant information cut off and awkward structures smoothed, because the space for news coverage is too limited. What is more, to get an upper hand in competing with counterparts, media have to simplify and shorten their language to guarantee minimum loss of time in collecting and distributing news. Truthfulness: as it is one part of news, a news headline should theoretically take on news qualities such as timeliness and truthfulness, the most valuable journalistic features. Besides, to tell truth but the fabricated information is the very responsibility of each news reporter and editor. For instance, it is due to the truthful report on the Tsunami of Indian Ocean that the world makes a quick response to launch worldwide donation campaigns for those devastated areas. Variousness: media have been constantly investing efforts into seeking fresh and novel appearances of news headlines. Even aiming at the same news event, different media may adopt sharply diversified headlines rather than uniformed formats. A headline must give the essence of the story. While explaining the story accurately, the story accurately, the

headline must fit into a limited space. A good headline should be attractive, and be able to catch the reader's attention once his eyes falls upon it. Therefore, the appeal of story largely depends on headline. The language of news headline is special and has its own characteristics on the lexical, grammatical and syntax level. It is characterized by its brevity, attractiveness, and clarity. The key to a good headline is the use, whenever possible, of strong action verbs. Headline writers use verbs in historical present tense, thus can describe the actions that had happened just now. This tense can express the feel of immediacy. English news headline often use short words, such as abbreviations and acronyms, and the articles, personal pronouns, are often omitted. The new words are very common in the news headline as the technology develop; people have to use new words to describe the new things.

In the news headline writing, the use of tense is flexible. Different tenses can express the freshness of the news. But the present tense is the most widely used tense in the English headline because it can describe the things which are happening in the present or in the past. The sentence of the news headline tends to be clear and simply. A sentence is more likely to be clear if it is a short sentence conveying only one thought, or a closely connected range of ideas. However, that is not to say that the headline must be simple sentences, to use a subordinate clause can state relations more precisely and more economically than a string of simple sentences or compound sentences joined by "and", "but", etc.

#### B. *The Function of News Headline*

The function of news headlines can never be underestimated. Concise and creative headlines will more often than not leave readers with such deep impressions that news details have faded into memory while headlines remain fresh in their mind.

Headlines are described as the "eyes" or "windows" of newspapers, through which readers can have the key information in news reports.

Generally speaking, news headlines in the modern time have the following major functions in application: First, news headlines sum up news content, enabling readers to enjoy much convenience and save considerable amounts of time while reading newspapers. Time is so precious in the modern society that people cannot be patient enough to go over all news details. Instead, only by browsing through news headlines can readers easily pick up the information for individual preferences. This kind of readers is called "Headline Readers". It is for this function that major Western newspapers intentionally set a special column named "Headline News" on their cover pages, in which news is short, brief and just like a headline. This kind of news enjoys wide popularity among readers for it sets them free from tedious and aimless reading. Second, news headlines are printed in varied fonts, sizes, colors and structures to decorate or beautify newspaper pages. In the process of newspaper production, special printing crafts are very often practiced to enhance the visual effect of newspapers thus magnetizing readers' attention.

As far as language functions are concerned, there has been no commonly acknowledged views either in the territory of linguistics or translation. Halliday articulates that social communication is the most important function of language because language serves as a communication tool; Hu Zhuanglin, a Chinese linguist, proposes seven language functions: phatic, directive, informative, interrogative, expressive, evocative and performative; Eugene Nida puts forward two basic language functions: the psychological function, which is internal or subjective means by which people can negotiate with reality, and the sociological function, which is external and interpersonal means by which people can negotiate with others. (Newmark, 2006) The aforementioned three functions are intertwined with each other--the informative function is the prerequisite of the other two, without which news headlines will lose the news quality or newsworthiness; the expressive function makes headlines look compelling and arresting to optimize the process of information dissemination; the vocative function prompts reactions among readers in case that editors can accordingly improve the quality of headlines.

#### IV. A CASE STUDY OF THE TRANSLATION OF ENGLISH NEWS HEADLINE ACCORDING TO THE SKOPOSTHEORIE

A further discussion of news translation by adopting the Skopostheorie introduced will be made in this part. By making a detailed analysis of the typical characteristics of the new, this chapter will attempt to illustrate the applicability of Skopostheorie by the concrete exemplifications and make a verification of how these rules contained in Skopostheorie function well in the news headline translation. The Skopostheorie is an optional theoretical guidance for news translation such as the headline, the lead and the body and in this paper, only the translation of the news headline is concerned.

The most important function of news headline is to express the information. Thus it must be translated correctly. The translators should pay attention to all the aspects in order to ensure there is no mistake in the headline. Sometimes the headlines may be translated unfriendly, to translate those headlines, the translator must insist on the political believe and try to protect the national esteem. For example, "Sino-US Talks: Result, Gap". In this headline, Gap means "cha ju", while some people translated it into "ju li", "ge he". That expression is negative, but the writer wants to express a friendly atmosphere between the two countries. So it should be "zhong mei hui tian, you jie guo, you cha ju". If the word "gap" was mistranslated, the wrong information would be express to the readers.

There is another example: "Annoyed by Cell-phones? Scientists Explain Why". This is the news is publish on China Daily. We don't know what is "Annoyed by Cell-phone" really means. However, the translated headline explained it

clearly: wei shen mo ting bie ren da dian hua hui nao xin?

The headline is the eye of a piece of news, so the accuracy of the diction is the most important point. Thus the readers can get a general idea of the news. For example: When the North and South Korea started to communicate, the headline of the 21st Century is: "Korean Talks to Started". Some news media translated it into "han guo tong yi yu bei chao xian ju xing fu bu ji hui tan", but it contains too many information, and which is not concerned by the readers. It can be translated into "nan bei chao xian kais hi dui hua", this translation did not mentioned the background of this talk, but the most important information was expressed.

The headline has the obligation to attract the readers' eyes, so the brilliant point is necessary. The dictions must be interesting and humorous. Let's use some examples to explain it. Barcelona Moves to Keep Bikinis off the Streets. There is no doubt that the word "bikinis" can attract most of the male readers successfully. Nearly every man loves the girl who wears bikini. However, in this headline, there is a verb phrase "keep off". If translate it into "qu zhu", it is a kind of mistranslate. Actually, it means people who wear bikini are not welcomed in Barcelona. So it was adjusted into ---ba sai luo na bu huan ying yong yi ke. Seven-year Itch? First You Must Survive the Seven-month Slouch. The same with the example above, this topic is also an interesting one. This headline can appeal to the couples whose love is becoming boring. Therefore, the translator used a slang in it to light it up: "qing lv zhi jian ye you qi nian zhi yang"?

The English headline has it unique connotation, a good headline often uses the proper rhetorical. To translate these kinds of headlines, the translator must understand the headline clearly and try to give a harmony translation. For example, "Desperate Need, Desperate Deed", in this headline, the word "need", and "deed" share the same rhythm. So it is hard to translate. It can be translated into "ran mei zhi ji, shi wan huo ji". Thus the rhythm is "ji" and this problem had been solved perfectly.

From the above analysis, we can take the criteria of the news headlines translation, namely fidelity, readability, adaptability and rapidity. Fidelity refers to the precise of the translated part concerning the content. As we all know, the translator must take the content of the news into the consideration when he is translating the news. The first and foremost task for him to do is to be loyal the original content and translate it in a proper way because news is required to reflect the in an objective way. So fidelity is the main principle for translating news headlines. Readability means that the translated version should be smooth for reading. To be more specific, the translation should be accessible both to the readers and translators. To arouse the interest of the readers' interest is the main purpose for the news headlines and translators, or it will reach the audiences even though it is a breaking one. Adaptability means that the translated version should be in a proper writing style which is related to news language, that is to say, the matching of the TL to the SL in the light of the style. Apart from the content and form, news headline has its specific style. Thus in translation the issue style is an essential and important. Every translator should take the grammar and diction of the Chinese counterpart in translation job, trying to ensure the news styles is suitable. As have been mentioned, translation content, translation form and translation style are the three elements for translating. And apart from the three rules or principles we have mentioned above, there is another rule, namely, the rapidity or translation speed. It means that the news headline translation must be done as quickly as possible. Because the news translation should be done at the required limited time without any delay. Thus the time interval between the happening and reporting is shorter, the news is more valuable. For this reason, the news will become useless even though it is translated well without the rapidity. All in all, timeliness of the news requires the rapidity of the news headlines.

## V. CONCLUSION

A well-wrought headline can pack an emotional punch or spark a rush of insight. Readers can be moved, angered, entertained or simply informed by the half-dozen words. It is without a doubt one of the most important jobs in journalism. A headline's value is that it helps organize the news on the page for readers mentally by organizing it visually. Without ever reading a story or looking at a photo, readers can glance at a newspaper page or a home page on website for a few seconds and know, in a general way, not only what information is on that page, but the importance of each one in relation to others as well.

On the one hand, the translation of journalistic English including that of English news headlines plays a crucial role in our daily life. On the other hand, to translate news reporting is absolutely no easy job. Special translation methods are required according to different grammatical features of headlines. Since news headlines are a kind of practical text genre, the translation purpose of attracting target readers is achieved to a certain extent by their function. To translate it efficiently, feasible and applicable translation strategies should be employed to facilitate the performing of functions of news headline in target language.

The skopostheorie is a considered to be effective guidance to analysis the translation of the news headlines. Under the guidance of this theory, translators can tackle the problems with different methods, but with one spirit. The most important thing is to transfer and convey the original sense of the source language, not every single word, phrase and their combination. Although the wording in English news headlines is usually simple, the translation work is by no means a piece of cake. Translators are often confronted with more problems of culture than those of language itself. They should always consider whether readers can understand and in the end accept the translation. Since, there is no formula in headline translation; translators should always tackle the each problem respectively. Headlines will continue to enhance the readability to receptors. Closeness is the future trend of headlines and more and more pop and modern

cultural elements and oral phrases will be added into headlines. Readers will be able to sense the breath of their life in headlines. Translators and researchers should keep focus on the study of western mainstream cultures and related elements, in order to keep pace with them. Thus, they can well understand the headlines.

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