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Research on the English Translation of Political News in China Daily from the Perspective of Functional Equivalence Theory

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Abstract

This article aims to explore the application of the Functional Equivalence Theory in the translation of political news, especially the translation practice of political news in the English version of China Daily. The study analyzes the lexical, syntactic, textual, and cultural equivalence in translation practices and discusses its impact on improving translation quality and enhancing cross-cultural communication. The findings indicate that in translating political news, China Daily successfully conveys key terms and proper nouns with precision, adapts syntactic structures to align with English conventions, and preserves the original text's overall framework and cultural context in its English versions. This study not only enriches the theoretical framework of translation but also provides valuable references and guidance for practical translation work, helping to improve the communication effect of Chinese political discourse on the international stage.

Keywords

Functional Equivalence Theory; Translation of Political News; Cross-cultural Communication; China Daily; Dissemination of Political Discourse.

1. Introduction

1.1. Research Background

In the context of globalization, news media plays a crucial role in disseminating information and shaping national soft power. With China's rising global influence, the English translation of political news, such as that in *China Daily* serves as a bridge for cross-cultural communication, conveying China's voice and image. Political news translation, linked to policies and international relations, holds significant academic and practical value. However, current research often focuses on translation techniques, lacking in-depth analysis of functional equivalence, particularly for political discourse. Challenges like term conversion and cultural adaptation persist. This study applies Functional Equivalence Theory to explore strategies for improving the translation quality of *China Daily's* political news, aiming to enhance cross-cultural communication and provide theoretical and practical insights.

1.2. Research objective

This study aims to uncover the functional equivalence in political news translation. By examining challenges and solutions at lexical, syntactic, and textual levels, it deepens the understanding of translation essence. Analyzing its application in *China Daily's* English translation helps transmit cultural and political information, thus enriching the theory and expanding its scope.

From the functional equivalence perspective, the current study offers strategies for China Daily's political news translation. Findings will aid translators in handling language and cultural issues, making the target language suit international audiences. This reduces barriers, enhances

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China's image, and creates a better public opinion environment for international exchanges. The study is also significant for translation education. It provides a practical guide for applying the theory in political news translation practices, which helps improve education quality and cultivate translation professionals with essential skills for their careers.

2. Literature Review

2.1. The Origin of Functional Equivalence Theory

Functional Equivalence Theory was initially proposed by American linguist Eugene A. Nida. In his book Towards a Science of Translating, Nida first introduced the concept as "dynamic equivalence," emphasizing that the understanding and reaction of readers to the translation should be the same or similar to their understanding and reaction to the original text [1]. As translation studies progressed, Nida realized that the term "dynamic" could lead to misunderstandings. Therefore, in 1986, he renamed "dynamic equivalence" to "functional equivalence" and further divided it into the minimum realistic level and the maximum ideal level. Nida stressed that translation should not be limited to the correspondence of linguistic forms but should pursue the consistency of reactions between the target text readers and the source text readers, aiming to break away from the traditional word-for-word translation model and open up new pathways for translation practice. For example, in the translation of religious texts, facing unique religious concepts and expressions in different cultural contexts, Nida found that mechanical formal equivalence could not enable target language readers to grasp the essence of the original text, which prompted him to explore an equivalence-oriented approach focusing on meaning and function.

2.2. The Development of Functional Equivalence Theory

Since its introduction by Nida, Functional Equivalence Theory has sparked extensive discussions and practical applications in the field of translation studies, with many scholars expanding and refining it. Peter Newmark is one of the significant developers of Functional Equivalence Theory. He categorized translation into two types: "semantic translation" and "communicative translation." Newmark argued that communicative translation is similar to Nida's dynamic equivalence theory, emphasizing the functional equivalence between the translation and the original text [2]. The goal of communicative translation is to make the translation easily understood and accepted by target language readers while conveying the meaning and style of the original text. There are indeed similarities between the initial dynamic equivalence and communicative translation; both are reader-oriented, focusing on the effectiveness of information transfer and considering the transformation of cultural factors. J.C. Catford also contributed to the development of Functional Equivalence Theory in his writings. Catford discussed the linguistic and cultural barriers arising from language differences in the translation process, and his translation shift theory helps to understand how functional equivalence can be achieved when facing these challenges [3]. Christiane Nord is a representative figure of functionalist translation theory. She emphasized that translation should follow the principle of purpose and choose appropriate translation strategies based on the function of the target text [4]. Nord systematically elaborated on functionalist translation theory and further expanded the scope of application of Functional Equivalence Theory.

In summary, foreign scholars have made important contributions to the development of Functional Equivalence Theory, promoting its continuous improvement and development. Functional Equivalence Theory has provided significant theoretical guidance for translation practice both domestically and internationally, helping to improve translation quality and promote cross-cultural communication.

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2.3. The Necessity of Applying Functional Equivalence Theory to the Translation of Political News

Political news is characterized by its authority, timeliness, and information density. First, as it involves formal contents such as national policies and international relations, the translation must accurately convey the meaning of the original text. Any misunderstanding or deviation could potentially lead to international public opinion issues. The principle of meaning priority emphasized by Functional Equivalence Theory ensures the accurate transmission of core information. Second, political news is aimed at the global audiences, and it is necessary to consider the acceptance of readers from different cultural backgrounds. By adopting functional equivalence, Chinese political terms and culture-loaded words can be presented in a way that is easily understood by target language readers, enhancing readability and improving communication effectiveness. For example, the "Belt and Road" Initiative would be difficult for foreign readers to understand if translated literally. However, by using functional equivalence for interpretative translation, the international community can quickly grasp its essence.

Bassnett proposed the "cultural turn" in translation studies, emphasizing that the translation of political news should take into account cultural background and ideology [5]. Samuel P. Huntington's theory of cultural conflict provides a new perspective for understanding the international dissemination of political news and translation strategies, highlighting the importance of cultural adaptability [6]. Conway argues that culture is the tension between political economy, society, and the subjective world, emphasizing the social nature of language and its role in shaping the understanding of the world. News translation needs to consider the shared meanings of the source and target language communities [7]. Kalantari suggests drawing on gatekeeping theory in journalism, viewing translation as a "gate" in news production and paying attention to the impact of institutional policies and ideologies [8]. Newmark classifies political news as "expressive texts" and proposes corresponding translation strategies [9]. Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) theory points out that news discourse actively constructs reality and influences public understanding [10]. Simpson analyzes the ideological tendencies in news language, revealing how language shapes views on political events [11].

2.4. The Feasibility of Applying Functional Equivalence Theory to the Translation of Political News

From a practical standpoint, the structure and language use of political news follow certain patterns, providing a basis for the implementation of functional equivalence. Most political news follows the "inverted pyramid" structure, which begins with the core event and then supplements with details. Translators can build a similar logic in the translation based on this structure to achieve functional equivalence at the discourse level. Moreover, the development of modern translation technology and tools, such as terminology databases and parallel corpora, helps translators quickly find corresponding expressions to achieve functional equivalence at the lexical and phrasal levels. At the same time, a wealth of excellent translation cases of political news has accumulated rich experience. Translators can draw on previous practices, combine functional equivalence theory, and flexibly handle cultural and rhetorical difficulties to produce high-quality translations that meet the needs of external communication.

In conclusion, Functional Equivalence Theory, with its solid theoretical foundation and wide applicability, provides a strong theoretical support and practical guidance for the study of English translation of political news in *China Daily.*

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3. Case analysis

3.1. Lexical equivalence

In the English translation of current affairs news in China Daily, lexical equivalence is reflected in the accurate transformation of professional terms and key information. For example, “中国第41次南极考察队” is translated as “China’s 41st Antarctic expedition team”. Here, “考察队” corresponds to “expedition team”, precisely conveying the professionalism of the original text. Another example is that “秦岭站” is directly translated as “Qinling Station”, preserving the original form of the proper noun, which is in line with the internationally accepted translation convention. Additionally, “气候变化对南极生态系统的影响” is translated as “the impact of climate change on the Antarctic ecosystem”. The words “影响” and “impact” are highly equivalent in semantics, ensuring the accurate transmission of information. The precise translation of these words not only retains the scientific nature and solemnity of the original text but also enhances the readability of the translated text. “战略性新兴产业” is translated as “strategic emerging industries”, where “新兴产业” and “emerging industries” are highly consistent in semantics, reflecting the frontier nature and dynamism of industry development. For instance, “极地环境保护” is translated as “polar environmental protection” , with “极地”and “polar” precisely corresponding to each other, highlighting the specificity of the protection object. By translating these words equivalently, the translated text not only accurately conveys the original information but also caters to the language preferences of English-speaking readers, thereby achieving lexical equivalence.

3.2. Syntactic equivalence

In the English translation of current affairs news in China Daily, the achievement of syntactic equivalence is reflected in the flexible adjustment of the structure of the Chinese original text by translators to adapt to English grammar and expression habits. For example, “中国第41次南极考察队” is translated as “China’s 41st Antarctic expedition team”. This transformation not only retains the core information of the original text but also makes the sentence structure more in line with English expressions through the use of the possessive form (“China’s”) and the ordinal number (“41st”). Another example is that “此次考察将开展南极秦岭站配套设施设备建设” is translated as “researchers will build the supporting infrastructure for the Qinling Station in Antarctica”. By using “researchers” as the subject, the sentence becomes more active and clearer, embodying the common subject-verb-object structure in English. Additionally, “秦岭站的建成” is translated as “ The completion of the building of the Qinling Station”, using the common nominalization structure in English, making the sentence more concise and formal.

In another report, “ 2024年1至11月，中央企业完成战略性新兴产业投资2万亿元，同比增长18.7%” is translated as “ China’s centrally - administered state - owned enterprises completed investment of 2 trillion yuan in strategic emerging industries from January to November in 2024, a year - on - year increase of 18.7 percent.” Here, the translator adjusts the sentence to align with the style of English news reports by adding a time adverbial phrase ("from January to November in 2024") and using the passive voice ("completed investment"), while retaining the key data and information from the original text. These syntactic adjustments not only ensure accurate information transmission but also enhance the fluency and naturalness of the translated text, thus better conforming to the language preferences of English-speaking readers.

3.3. Textual equivalence

Textual equivalence emphasizes that the translated text should be consistent with the original text in terms of overall structure and information transmission, ensuring that readers can obtain a reading experience similar to that of the original - text readers. In the bilingual texts of

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China Daily, this equivalence is fully demonstrated. For example, when reporting on the tasks of China's 41st Antarctic expedition team, the original text details the goals of the expedition team, the construction background and significance of the Qinling Station. The translated text unfolds in the same logical order, ensuring the integrity and coherence of the information. The sentence in the translated text "Over the coming months, researchers will build the supporting infrastructure for the Qinling Station in Antarctica" not only retains the time and task information of the original text but also accurately conveys the meaning of "配套设施设备建设" through "supporting infrastructure", meeting the requirements of textual equivalence.

In addition, when reporting on President Xi Jinping's congratulatory letter, the original text emphasizes the great significance of the completion of the Qinling Station for global scientific exploration. The translated text also achieves this by accurately rendering the phrase "provide a strong guarantee for scientists in China and around the world," thereby retaining the tone and intention of the original. This precise handling of text structure and information transmission ensures that the translation is highly consistent with the original text in terms of logic and coherence, thus achieving textual equivalence.

3.4. Cultural equivalence

Cultural equivalence is an important dimension in the Functional Equivalence Theory. It requires that in the process of information transmission, the translation should take into account the cultural connotations of both the source language and the target language. In the English translation of current affairs news in China Daily, the handling of cultural equivalence is particularly crucial. For example, when reporting on China's Qinling Station in Antarctica, the original text states that "the main body of the Qinling Station is designed in the shape of the Southern Cross, and the design concept is derived from the Southern Cross navigation used by Zheng He, a Chinese navigator during his voyages to the Western Seas." In the English translation, it is simplified to "the station's design is inspired by the Southern Cross used in ancient Chinese navigation". Although the basic cultural image is retained, the expression "Zheng He's voyages to the Western Seas", which has a profound cultural background, is omitted. This may lead to –the lack of in-depth understanding of the cultural connotation by target - language readers. This approach sacrifices the integrity of cultural equivalence to a certain extent, but it is in line with the general level of international readers' understanding of Chinese cultural backgrounds.

In another case, President Xi Jinping mentioned in his speech at the APEC Economic Leaders' Meeting that "An ancient Chinese saying goes, '道之所在，虽千万人吾往矣。' " The English translation is "An ancient Chinese sage said, 'For a righteous cause, I shall press forward, undaunted by thousands standing in my way.' " This translation not only retains the cultural image of the original text but also makes it more in line with English expression habits through free translation. At the same time, it conveys the value of "upholding justice" in Chinese culture. This translation strategy is relatively advocated in handling cultural equivalence. It not only preserves the cultural connotation but also avoids cultural barriers, reflecting the flexibility and effectiveness of the Functional Equivalence Theory in cross - cultural communication.

4. Conclusion

4.1. Major Findings

In the English translations of political news from China Daily, key terms and proper nouns are accurately rendered. For instance, the professional term "考察队" is appropriately translated as "expedition team," and the place name "秦岭站" is translated in accordance with international standards. Secondly, China Daily's translations adjust Chinese sentence structures to align with English grammar, such as adding temporal clauses or converting

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parallel structures. Furthermore, China Daily's translations retain the overall structure and information of the original news, ensuring readers understand the mission, objectives, and significance of events like Antarctic expeditions. Lastly, China Daily preserves cultural concepts and provides explanations when necessary, such as the cultural significance of the design inspiration for Qinling Station, which is derived from the Southern Cross constellation used by the Chinese navigator Zheng He.

In conclusion, the application of the Functional Equivalence Theory to political news translation could apply to maintain the accuracy of the original text while ensuring that the English version is natural and comprehensible to English-speaking readers, adhering to the principles of "faithfulness, expressiveness, and readability."

4.2. Limitation and future recommendation

This study applies Functional Equivalence Theory to political news translation, exploring its implementation across multiple dimensions to broaden theoretical perspectives and provide new research directions. It offers practical translation strategies to improve translation quality, ensuring accurate cross-cultural communication of China's political discourse and enhancing global understanding of its political stance. By emphasizing the balance between information and cultural connotations, the study provides valuable insights for cross-cultural news dissemination, promoting deeper intercultural communication. However, the research has limitations, including the small sample from China Daily, which may limit the generalization of the findings. Such static analytical methods may fail to capture dynamic language and cultural changes, and the analysis of cultural equivalence relies on limited cases. Future research should expand the range of news sources and themes, conduct longitudinal studies to track translation strategy changes, and explore the dynamic impact of cultural backgrounds on reader reception. Additionally, integrating interdisciplinary approaches from sociology and psychology could deepen the analysis of political news translation, enhance its effectiveness and influence in international communication. These improvements would provide more comprehensive and timely guidance for translation practice.

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