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Translating News Titles: A Case Study on Wimbledon Championship at Xinhuanet.com

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Abstract

In the era of globalization, there is a growing focus on news related to international sports events. To keep up with this trend, domestic media outlets need to translate a large volume of sports news. In this article, the author will conduct a case study of xinhuanet.com, using the Wimbledon Open as its focus. Altogether, it will involve a study of approximately 80 news headlines from xinhuanet.com between June 24 and July 7, 2013. The author attempts to outline the strategies used by translators and explain them within the framework of Nida's theory of Dynamic Equivalence. Major findings are as follows: 1) The author explores the similarities between Chinese and English news headlines and elaborates on the differences between them. They are similar in their use of digits, grammatical ellipsis, and refining the content of news, but they differ in vocabulary, tense, and format. 2) Nida's Dynamic Equivalence could actually be applied to the translation of news headlines. In Nida's thoughts, Dynamic Equivalence includes three essential terms: equivalence, naturalness, and closest approximation. While the primary goal of a sports news headline is to attract readers' attention, pique their interest, and provide the latest information. Therefore, it is appropriate to apply the dynamic equivalence translation theory to the translation of sports news headlines. The author will elaborate on five strategies, including literal translation, amplification, substitution, omission, and zero translation in sports news translation, by continuing to compare the similarities and differences between Chinese and English sports news headlines.

Keywords

News headlines, Wimbledon Open, Dynamic Equivalence, Translation strategies

1. Literature Review

Overseas researchers as well as scholars have pointed out that the style of news headlines is different from the styles of ordinary sentences and examined the disciplines of headline translation from various aspects. Translation in *Global News*, which was written by English scholar Bielsa. E. and Bassnett. S. described the role of the news agencies from a historical perspective. They point out that the spread of accurate information through different regions, languages, and cultures is becoming more and more important.

Domestic scholar Xu Mingwu (2003) said: "News is the prompt report about the facts which either occurred or is occurring or will occur." Zhou Junqing (1996) believed that the application of the register theory to the translation provided a kind of norm for the description of certain extra-linguistic factors, which was of help in achieving successful meaning transference.

These major previous research achievements on English news headlines can be summarized as follows. Firstly, most studies on English news headlines focus on their character and function. The thesis takes the Chinese and English reports on the 2013 Wimbledon Open as its corpus, which is unusual. Secondly, some previous research on news

headlines put forward some feasible and practical translation strategies for news headlines translation. Thirdly, as for the translation of sports news headlines, most scholars tend to adopt the Relevance Theory, Skopos Theory, or Functional Theory for translation.

2. Nida and Dynamic Equivalence

2.1 Formal Correspondence

The theory of equivalence includes two parts: dynamic equivalence and formal equivalence. Formal equivalence tends to emphasize fidelity to the lexical details and grammatical structure of the original language. In diplomacy or some business things, people may stick to formal equivalence, as they believe that fidelity to the grammatical structure of the language is more accurate; while in literature, a novel translation might prefer to use dynamic equivalence in order to let it read well. However, formal equivalence is often more of a goal than a reality. For example, one language may contain a word for a concept, but it has no direct equivalent in another language. In this situation, dynamic equivalence translation is more suitable to be used to represent the source language.

2.2 Dynamic Equivalence

According to Nida, dynamic equivalence is the “quality of a translation”, in which the message of the original text has been so transported into the receptor language that the response of the receptor is essentially like that of the original receptors (Nida & Taber, 1969, p. 200). In other words, it means that the target readers could understand the translation in the same manner as well as the original readers did.

In later years, Nida distanced himself from the term "dynamic equivalence" and preferred the term "functional equivalence". The term "functional equivalence" suggests not just that the equivalence is between the function of the source text in the source culture and the function of the target translation in the target culture, which stresses that the readers of the source text and readers of translation version enjoy the same effect, and then Nida gives his definition of translation from the perspective of equivalence in his book *The Theory and Practice of 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 (Nida & Taber, 2004, p. 12).

2.3 Implications for the Present Study

In Nida’s dynamic equivalence translation theory, he has put forward the maximal definition and the minimal definition. According to Nida, a maximal definition is an ideal definition of dynamic equivalence, which could be stated that the target readers could understand the translation in the same manner as the original readers did. A minimal definition is a realistic definition of dynamic equivalence, which could be stated as the target readers should be able to understand the translation in the same manner as the original readers did, which means that the absolute equivalence is just an ideal. In our daily life translation, minimal translation is preferred to be used, and maximal translation is the ideal direction for translators to pursue.

In the sports news headlines translation, the major target is to draw readers' attention and arouse their reading interest. As the difference between Chinese and English sports news headlines, translators have to appreciate the news title in the source text first and then shift the title to the target text receptor thus making the two versions equivalent. The traditional translation standards emphasize being loyal to the source language, however, the dynamic equivalence translation theory abandons it and prefers to adoptions to rhetoric, culture, and lexicon. In such cases, translators have more freedom to meet the target readers’ cultural and linguistic needs. This is just in accordance with the purpose of news headline translation, which aims to attract receptors’ reading interest and deliver the latest news to them. Therefore, it is actually practical to apply dynamic equivalence translation theory to sports news headline translation.

3. Wimbledon Open 2013 and the News Reports about It

3.1 Overview of Xinhuanet.com

The Xinhua News Agency is one of the most important press agencies in China, which operates 31 departments in China and 107 foreign departments worldwide. Besides, almost all of the newspapers in China depend on Xinhua to

fill up their pages. For example, *People's Daily* uses the material of Xinhua for about 25 percent of its stories. Xinhua owns more than 20 newspapers and a dozen magazines, and it prints in eight languages: Chinese, French, English, Russian, Portuguese, Arabic, Japanese and Spanish.

The Xinhuanet website usually contains five sections: current politics, international news, finance and economics, entertainment, and sports. In the sports section, six items include soccer, basketball, tennis, table tennis, sports stars, and others. The headlines for the 2013 Wimbledon Open in this thesis were selected from the sports section. Xinhuanet.com delivers its news across the world in six languages: Chinese, French, Russian, Spanish, and Arabic.

3.2 Wimbledon Open 2013

The 2013 Wimbledon Championships were a tennis tournament that ran from June 24 to July 7. It played on outdoor grass courts and took place at the All England Lawn Tennis and Croquet Club. The Wimbledon Open consisted of events for professional players in doubles, mixed doubles, and singles. Wheelchair and junior players also took part in these events. In the Wimbledon Open, neither could repeat Roger Federer' and Serena Willam's success, as they were the defending champions in singles events. Along with two-time semi-finalist Jo-Wilfried Tsonga, 2004 champion Maria Sharapova, former World No.1s Victoria Azarenka, and two-time champion Rafael Nadal, Federer and Williams were two of a number of big-name casualties in the early rounds.

Australian Open, French Open, U.S. Open, and Wimbledon Open are called as Grand Slams Tennis.

3.3 News about Wimbledon Open 2013 at Xinhuanet.com

In this thesis, the author has studied about 80 news headlines from June 24 to July 7, 2013, on *Xinhuanet.com*.

4. Applying Theory to the Case Study

To some degree, translation is a kind of media by which the communicative activities in the source language can be expressed to the receptors. As a unique style of language, sports news titles translation is not merely transferring information, its focal points lie in conveying messages and drawing readers' attention. Nida points out that "it is dynamic equivalence which is required, whether on the level of content or on the level of style" (Nida & Tabor, 1969, p. 14). Just like what Nida points out, the target text not only needs to reproduce the original style and charm but also to stir up the feelings of the receptors as the original one to the source readers.

4.1 Resemblances between Chinese and English Sports News Headlines

4.1.1 Refining the Content of News

The most important function, of both English and Chinese news headlines, is to summarize the main information of the news. Given the limited space and reader's patience, editors of news headlines are expected to use the least words to express the richest content. Therefore, except for the requirement for terse sentence structure, news headlines should be abridged in words as much as possible. Lengthy news headlines can easily spoil the reader's pleasure for further reading.

4.1.2 Grammatical Ellipsis

At the beginning, each headline is a complete sentence. In order to highlight the theme of news, however, the editor omits several words or grammatical components. In terms of grammar, the English and Chinese sports news headlines have different characteristics, but both of them use ellipsis flexibly.

4.1.3 Using Digits

Generally, digits are used to show the scores of the competition which are indispensable to sports events. However, the using of digits in headlines sometimes can have unexpected effects, such as drawing the reader's attention, and making the main information of the news seem clearer. The following examples could prove this well.

4.2 Differences between Chinese and English Sports News Headlines

4.2.1 Differences in Vocabulary

English sports news headlines prefer to use nouns while Chinese sports news headlines tend to use verbs. However, both of them are likely to use midget words, shortened words, as well as vogue words.

4.2.2 Differences in Tense

In English sports news headlines, simple present tense, present continuous tense, and simple future tense are used frequently, as they are quite obvious in terms of tense signs. Generally, the simple present is used more extensively.

The tense of Chinese sports news headlines is more flexible, except the present tense, past tense, continuous tense, and future tense are often used. In a Chinese headline, the tense sign of present tense is very vague. In some cases, it can represent the past tense like the English one.

4.2.3 Differences in Format

Generally speaking, the most important requirement in English sports news headlines is conciseness. What they asked is to use the shortest sentence to elaborate on the most important things of the news. Therefore, a piece of news, no matter how long it is, only has a concise headline. In Chinese, although conciseness is also important, a headline always tries to cover all the information in the news. Consequently, a piece of Chinese news often has two headlines: a main title and a subtitle.

4.3 Translation Strategies for Dynamic Equivalence

In Nida's thought, the natural equivalence includes three principles: Natural, which points towards the target language; equivalence, which points toward the source language; and closest, which binds the two orientations together on the basis of the highest degree of approximation. The traditional translation standards emphasize being loyal to the source language, however, the dynamic equivalence translation theory abandons it and prefers to adoptions to rhetoric, culture, and lexicon. This is just fits the purpose of news headline translation, which aims to attract target readers' attention and deliver the latest news to them. Here are five methods the author put forward to translate English sports news headlines.

4.3.1 Literal Translation

Literal translation, or directed translation, is the rendering of text from one language to another "word-for-word" with or without conveying the sense of the original. It is the most familiar translation method between both English and Chinese, and it is not difficult for readers or audiences to understand.

4.3.2 Amplification

In some English news titles, some words may contain rich cultural implications or reflect a particular way of life. To source language readers, these words are meaningful as the native people always know their own culture well. However, to target receptors, these words are too abstract to them. To turn these words into something understandable to target readers is very important. This is particularly important in translating news headlines from the theory of dynamic equivalence; because the purpose of such translating is to help the target receptors have a similar feeling to the source language readers.

4.3.3 Substitution

During the progress of translation, some words in the source language might be replaced by other words. These words are different in concept from the source language but similar in cultural meaning to the target language. This kind of translation is called substitution.

4.3.4 Omission

As the features of translation, wordy statements may puzzle readers or disperse readers' attention, and make them lack interest to read the following news. Therefore, some redundant words should be deleted to attract readers' attention.

4.3.5 Zero translation

According to Prof. Qiu Maoru of SISU, the so-called Zero translation is where the translator does not use the words available in the target language to translate the words in the source language. It contains two sorts of implications: one is the disuse of the words available in the target language to translate the source language words, and the other is the intentional un-translating of the words in the source language.

5. Conclusion

5.1 Summary

The translation of news titles is one of the key factors in whether foreign news can attract readers. Due to the

different thoughts, experiences, and knowledge of translators, the translations of one news title may vary a lot. A faithful or intriguing translation can add brilliance to the news, leading the audience to a pleasant aftertaste of the news and chewing the title. However, if the translator happens to mistranslate the source title, the translation will become an obstacle to the audience's understanding of the news.

On the basis of the study of 80 news headlines from June 24 to July 7, 2013, on xinhuanet.com, the author has three major findings. Firstly, the author has found the similarities and differences between Chinese and English news headlines. They are similar in using digits, grammatical ellipsis, and refining the content of news, but different in vocabulary, tense, and format. Secondly, Nida's Dynamic Equivalence could be adapted for translating news titles. The major purpose of sports news headlines is to draw readers' attention, arouse their reading interest, and deliver the latest information. Therefore, it is appropriate to apply Dynamic Equivalence theory to sports news headlines translation. Thirdly, by analyzing the resemblances and differences between Chinese and English sports news headlines, the author has elaborated five strategies for sports news headline translation including literal translation, amplification, substitution, omission, and zero translation.

5.2 Limitations

There is no ideal thing in the world. Therefore, this thesis is far from perfect and obviously, there is still much room for further improvement. Firstly, examples of news headlines are only collected from the 2013 Wimbledon Championships on the Xinhuanet website. It is necessary to probe some other ways to get the news, such as the newspaper and other websites apart from *Xinhuanet.com*. Secondly, after comparing the commons and differences between Chinese and English news headlines, the author is only concerned with the methods of English-to-Chinese translation. Thirdly, besides the dynamic equivalence, there are many other translations that theories should be discussed in this aspect. Moreover, the translation of the lead and the body in the news are not involved in this thesis.

5.3 Expectations for Future Study

This thesis is far from satisfactory because of its restrictions on the study, for future studies, a thorough analysis of factors and strategies from the relevance triangle should be done. For instance, researchers could pay more attention to the comparison among different media agencies' sports news reports in China and abroad. Besides, it is essential to explore the translation of other parts of sports news reports such as the body and the lead. Meanwhile, a deeper study of the translation of both Chinese and English news headlines should be involved.

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