

# Translation Strategies of Fuzzy Language in English News Leads:

## A Case Study of News Leads from Foreign Journals

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**Abstract**—Language fuzziness, one of the most significant features of human natural languages, has been existing since the birth of languages. It has been widely applied in various texts, also including English news leads. The paper aims to probe into some E-C translation strategies of fuzzy language in English news leads with reference to some translators' versions of news leads from foreign journals, which are the strategy of equivalence, the strategy of conversion, the strategy of expansion and the strategy of omission.

**Keywords**—English news leads; fuzzy language; translation strategies

### I. INTRODUCTION

Fuzziness, differing from generality, ambiguity and equivocality, refers to the indefiniteness of the referential boundary of a category [1]. It means an expression having an uncertain extensional denotation. For example, how "tall" is tall? And how "short" is short? In this example, tall and short have uncertain extensional denotations. The root reason why there is language fuzziness is that the boundaries and properties of objects often can be both A and non-A. And then when using linguistic symbols to describe the objects, there exists fuzziness naturally [2]. Therefore, language fuzziness, an intrinsic characteristic of human natural languages, has been existing and aroused much attention since time out of mind. Around 400BC, it was taken into consideration by Eubulides, an ancient Greek philosopher, for the first time. The study of language fuzziness, however, originates from Fuzzy Sets [3] published in Information and Control by American cybernetician, L.A.Zadeh in 1965. It points out that there is often no clear-cut boundary in objects encountered in the real material world. Since then, the study and application of fuzziness has sprang up in many fields and disciplines, for instance, fuzzy math, fuzzy logic, artificial intelligence, aesthetics, art, fuzzy linguistics and etc. In China, WU Tieping is the pioneer in researching fuzzy linguistics. His Fuzzy Linguistics [4], published in 1986, is the first monograph which systematically studies fuzzy language in China, exerting a widespread and far-reaching impact over the researches on fuzzy linguistics.

According to Brain Brooks, a journalism professor from the University of Missouri, a piece of news is "A simple, clear statement consisting of the first paragraph or two of a

story. In this paragraph, you have to answer six basic questions, who, what, when, why, and how" [5]. A news lead is an essential part of the whole news, which usually informs readers the core contents of the report and set the tone for the whole report. An effective news lead can appeal to readers and make them fall in love with the news at the first sight.

Fuzziness, as an inherent feature of human natural languages, also prevails in English news leads. With the aim of making the study more meaningful, the author narrows down the focus on the translation strategies of fuzzy language in English news leads from foreign journals. The versions of the translations are from the skillful translators who work for YouLinYouKe, a content company serving for English learners. And the paper adopts Newmark's communicative translation theory as the criterion in evaluating the translated materials. It explores four main translating strategies, the strategy of equivalence, the strategy of conversion, the strategy of expansion and the strategy of omission.

### II. THE FUNCTIONS OF FUZZY LANGUAGE IN ENGLISH NEWS LEADS

The view that news language should be precise has, for a long time, been rooted in many people's minds as reliability and objectivity are the prerequisites of news. Among those people, some of them who do not acquaint themselves with fuzzy language hold that it is in contradict to precise language. Hence, they may not accept the existence of fuzzy language in English news, especially in English news leads since a news lead is the most important part of the whole news. However, that is their misunderstandings toward fuzzy language. In fact, with the features of fuzziness, uncertainty and flexibility, fuzzy language is often applied in English news leads. The paper is to give an explanation of some functions of fuzzy language in English news leads.

#### A. Catering to Reading Psychology of Audiences

The application of fuzzy language in English news leads can cater to the reading psychology of readers. Generally speaking, audiences usually read newspapers for the purpose of learning about the latest events at home and abroad or getting some materials to entertain themselves. Hence, in most cases, they just need to get a general idea about the

news events through reading news leads instead of getting to know every detail in them. Hence, if a news lead is full of precise details, it will appear long-winded and probably put readers off. Then, journalists can use some fuzzy language to give a brief and concise overview about news events. Therefore, the application of fuzzy language in news leads can meet the reading psychology of readers. Here is an example:

Herbal remedies have been used by healers around the world for centuries to prevent and treat disease. But it's in China that the practice has been most extensively used and documented (CNN, May28, 2019).

In this lead, "herbal remedie"s is a fuzzy expression because the boundary between the herbal remedies and other remedies is uncertain and the remedies do not have the certain extensional denotations. And "for centuries" and "most extensively" are also fuzzy expressions. However, these fuzzy expressions can meet the psychology of the readers because they are likely to get a general idea about this event instead of catching detailed information about herbal remedies and the exact history and influence of the remedies.

#### *B. Giving More Flexibility for Journalists in Writing News Reports*

News events required by timeliness often occur randomly. For this reason, it is hard for journalists to get a precise and thorough background of the news events within a short time; and it is also difficult for them to make an accurate judgment on the impact and development trends of the news events. In this case, fuzzy language can give journalists more flexibility to synoptically describe the backgrounds, effects and development trends of the news events. Here is an example:

Climate change is eating the glaciers of the Himalayas, posing a grave threat to hundreds of millions of people who live downstream, a latest study has shown (New York Times, June 19, 2019).

In this lead, the journalist just needs to generalize the influence caused by climate change instead of describing the detailed impact led by climate change. Besides, it is almost impossible for the journalist to get a clear picture about the influence caused by climate change in a short time. Thus, the journalist flexibly employs the fuzzy expression "grave threat" to generalize the impact that climate change exerts on the people who live downstream. And about the number of people who live downstream, it is also hard for the journalist to get an accurate data in a short time since the population here is large. Therefore, the fuzzy expression "hundreds of millions of" can be used here to give a ballpark figure.

#### *C. Mitigating Negative Effects*

News reports, especially the news about political issues and diplomatic policies of the countries, are limited by news policies. Accordingly, the wording of news is of great importance. There exist disputes which result from some absolute or extreme terms in news media both within and between nations. Therefore, when journalists write news

leads which play a key role in the whole reports, they should pay more attention to the matter of wording. In this case, fuzzy language could be a good tool because it can help avoid absolutization which may give rise to indignation, hostility, violation and other adverse impacts. For this reason, fuzzy language could help mitigate negative effects. Here is an example:

President Donald Trump's state visit itself will be an extravaganza of protests and pomp. It will also be a test of how special the relationship between America and Britain can remain in the face of serious strains. (The Economist, June2, 2019)

In this lead, "special" is a fuzzy word which tactfully and vaguely illustrates the current relationship between America and Britain under the tense situation. The journalist adopts the fuzzy word to describe the relationship in a euphemistic way instead of an absolute way, which can lessen the risk of leading to some unnecessary trouble on the bilateral relations.

#### *D. Enhancing Reliability and Objectivity of the News*

As is known, reliability and objectivity are the two vital elements of news. And reliability and objectivity are often tied up with precise language. However, there often exist uncertainties in the news events themselves, such as some dynamic news events. In this case, it is not appropriate to use precise language to describe the news events especially the news leads. Fuzzy language with its special function of expressing indeterminacy can be a good choice to make the news leads more reliable and objective. Besides, a news source often given in the news lead is also an important element to prove the reliability and objectivity of the news. However, it is often the case that some news sources are from a group of people, several organizations, many countries and etc. which are almost impossible to be listed one by one in the news lead. In this case, fuzzy language can work to generalize news sources, which also can prove the reliability and objectivity of news. For example:

More than 550 Americans have contracted measles so far this year (The Economist, April 28, 2019).

In this news lead, the hedge "more than" can increase the credibility of the news event for the reason that the number of people who contracted the measles is increasing, leading to the result that the news reporter can not give an exact number. Thus, the use of hedge "more than" helps make the news more reliable and objective. And here is another example:

People are more likely to return a lost wallet with money inside than an empty wallet, concluded "a group of international researchers" who set out to test the tension between financial self-interest and honesty of people around the world.

In this news lead, the fuzzy expression "a group of international researchers" explains the authentic source of the news. Although it does not list the detailed information about the researchers, it still presents the objectivity of the news.

### E. Protecting Privacy

Journalists sometimes need to protect the privacy of some news figures, some news sources and even the journalists themselves. Since news leads, the most essential part of the news, tend to capture more attention of the readers, journalists often employ fuzzy language to blur some private information that they want to safeguard. For example:

A Chinese scientist has claimed he helped make the world's first genetically modified human beings: twin girls whose DNA he said he altered (Daily Express, November 29, 2018).

The news event revealed a controversial matter: genetic modification of human beings, which involves the ethical issues. In this news event, the private information of the "twin girls" including names, the birthplace, the family background and etc. need to be concealed, or the girls' growth will be likely to be greatly impacted. Therefore, the journalist uses the fuzzy expressions "twin girls" to blur the exact private information of them.

### III. NEWMARK'S COMMUNICATIVE TRANSLATION THEORY

Peter Newmark, the world-renowned translator and translation theorist, put forward the communicative translation theory in his work *Approaches to Translation* in 1981. He said: Communicative translation attempts to produce on its readers an effect as close as possible to that obtained on the readers of the original [6]. Generally, a communicative translation is likely to be smoother, simpler and clearer, conforming to the target readers' reading habit and the way of thinking. The reason is that communicative translation addresses itself solely to the second reader, who does not anticipate difficulties or obscurities, and would expect a generous transfer of foreign elements into his own culture as well as his language where necessary [6]. And another reason is that the communicative translation theory advocates that translation should break the restraints of the source language (hereafter the author will use 'SL' to replace 'source language'), allow full play to the preponderance of the target language (hereafter the author will use 'TL' to replace 'target language') and utilize idiomatic language expressions so as to achieve the communicative function of translations.

Communicative translation lays more emphasis on the communicative function of the translation and the translation of fuzzy language in English news leads should also achieve the communicative function. Therefore, communicative translation theory has significant guidance for the translation of fuzzy language translation in English news leads, which is adopted by the author as the criterion for evaluating the translations.

### IV. TRANSLATION STRATEGIES OF FUZZY LANGUAGE IN ENGLISH NEWS LEADS

As the starting as well as the most important part of news reports, a news lead is usually the top concern of most readers. And as fuzzy language tends to functions a lot, it

extensively exists in English news leads. With a good command of translation strategies for fuzzy language in English news leads, the translators of news can render a better translation of the news leads to the target readers. This paper is to discuss some specific translation strategies of fuzzy language in English news leads under the guidance of Peter Newmark's communicative translation theory.

#### A. Translation Strategy of Equivalence

Humans often have relative uniformity in their cognition towards both the objective and subjective world, which results in similarity in their language expressing styles. That means if an expression is fuzzy in one language, there often exists its fuzzy counterpart in any other languages. Therefore, translators can practice the equivalent translation strategy to render fuzzy expressions in English news leads into counterparts. For instance:

A recent study in the UK has revealed an interesting trend in naming babies (YLYK, July15, 2019).

最近, 英国的一项研究揭示了给宝宝起名的一个有趣趋势。

In this news lead, "recent" is a fuzzy word because it means "having happened or started only a short time ago", but "a short time" itself is also a fuzzy expression. Thus "recent" conveys a fuzzy concept about time. And in Chinese expression, the meaning of fuzzy expression "最近" is almost equivalent to "recent" in the news lead. Thus, the translator renders it as "最近". Another fuzzy expression "an interesting trend" has its counterpart in Chinese. Therefore, it can be translated as the fuzzy expression "有趣趋势". In this example, the author adopts the strategy of equivalence to translate the fuzzy expressions, conforming to the literal translation. The translation is concise, smooth and clear, which achieves the communicative function. Here is another example:

Europe's sizzling heat wave this summer is fueling a change of heart with regard to the very foreign notion of air conditioning. A string of brutally blistering summers has seen Europeans struggling to grapple with the relentless spike in average temperatures, the result of global climate change (YLYK, July17th, 2019).

今夏的汹涌热浪正促使欧洲人对空调这一非常陌生的概念刮目相看。作为全球气候变化的结果, 连年来的酷热夏季让欧洲人疲于应对平均气温的无情飙升。

In this news leads, the fuzzy word "very" has a meaning "used before adjectives, adverbs and determiners to mean 'in a high degree' or 'extremely' " and "foreign" contains a meaning of "not known to sb or sth and therefore seeming strange". The two fuzzy words have their fuzzy counterparts in Chinese. Thus, the translator renders them into 非常 '陌生'. And another fuzzy word "relentless" has a meaning of refusing to be less cruel or severe and the fuzzy expression which has almost the same meaning to it can be found in Chinese. Therefore, the translator renders it as "无情". The translation of fuzzy expressions under the guidance of equivalent translation strategy achieves the faithfulness to SL and realizes the communicative function.

### B. Translation Strategy of Conversion

English and Chinese belong to different language families, between which there exist many differences, including vocabulary, pronunciation, grammar rules and etc. Thus, it is common that sometimes it is not available to find the complete equivalent fuzzy words or phrases between the two languages. In this case, conversion could be a flexible means to translate fuzzy words, phrases and sentences because it can help avoid translationese and present some translations which could accurately convey the meaning of SL and conform to the expression habits of the TL. Newmark's communicative translation gives translators relatively more subjectivity, which also means translators can properly apply the conversion strategy to the translation. And the thesis focuses on discussing the conversion of part of speech. Here is an example:

In all likelihood, the enduring physical legacy of China's internet boom will not be the glass-and-steel office complexes or the fancy apartments for tech elites (New York Times, June 4, 2019).

中国互联网发展得如火如荼，它不朽的物质遗产极有可能不是玻璃和钢筋筑成的办公大楼，也不是供科技精英们居住的高档公寓。

In this news lead, the fuzzy word "boom" is a noun with the meaning of "a sudden increase in economic activity". The translator practices the conversion strategy to convert the part of speech of "boom" into an adverb in TL and employs the Chinese four-character idiom "如火如荼". With the meaning of grow vigorously, the fuzzy expression- 如火如荼 is a much-loved expression in Chinese. Thus, the translator's skillful application of the translation strategy of conversation here helps present a smooth and idiomatic translation. Here is another example:

A campaign against long working hours by professionals in China's technology sector has been trending on the internet worldwide in a rare display of labour organising across countries.

中国科技行业从业者发起了一场抗议工作时间过长的运动，在世界各地的互联网上得到了大量传播，而这一现象也罕见地反映出了各国的劳动力组织形式。

In this news lead, the translator converts the fuzzy expression "a rare display", which is an adjective-noun structure into an adverb-verb structure "罕见地反映出" in Chinese. The translation conforms to the language structure of TL and can achieve a better communicative function.

### C. Translation Strategy of Expansion

Owing to that there exist great discrepancies in the aspects of grammar rules, semantic structure and syntactic rhetoric between Chinese and English, translators, in order to make the translations more readable and idiomatic, need to add some essential supplementary information on the basis of correct understanding of SL. This is called the translation strategy of expansion, which generally includes adding information in five aspects: grammar, semantic, rhetoric, collocation and cultural connotation. While translating fuzzy language in English news leads, translators can resort to this translation strategy. Here is an example:

When a friend or relative introduces their new partner, it can seem like a case of *deja vu*. Now research has backed up what many have long suspected: people really do have a type when it comes to coupling up (Guardian, June 15, 2019).

朋友或亲戚介绍他们的新伴侣时，你可能会有一种似曾相识的感觉。如今，调查研究证实了一个许多人怀疑了很久的现象：在找对象方面，人们真的会对某一类人情有独钟。

In this news lead, "have a type" is a fuzzy expression which means "people have a particular type preference while finding partners" in this context. If the translator follows literal translation, the translation will be "有某一种类型", which has translationese and puzzle target readers. However, the translator skillfully converts the verb-object construction- "have a type" in SL into preposition-object construction- "对某一类人" in TL and adds a Chinese four-character idiom "情有独钟" in the aspect of semantic based on the SL text which means "have special preference to". In Chinese context, this idiom, which is also a fuzzy expression, containing the meaning of "having high preference to somebody or something", enjoys popularity. Therefore, the application of the translation strategy of expansion here helps present a smooth, readable and idiomatic translation and give full play to the advantages of TL, which can achieve a better communicative function. Here is another example:

Donald Trump lands in Tokyo this weekend as Japan's first state guest in the new imperial era.

本周末，唐纳德·特朗普驾临东京，成为日本令和新时代的第一位国宾。

In this news lead, the translator adds "令和" to the translation of fuzzy expression 'the new imperial era', which makes the fuzzy concept more precise in TL because "令和" is the new reign title of Japan from April 1, 2019. The translation strategy of expansion here adds some cultural background information, giving target readers an access to understand more about the fuzzy concept in SL. Thus, the translation can realize a better communicative function.

### D. Translation Strategy of Omission

Omission is a translation strategy that omits some words or expressions to make translated versions concise and clear rather than verbose or clumsy. Proper omission in English-Chinese translation often involves omitting some words, such as prepositions, articles, certain pronouns, and etc. that are indispensable in SL texts but unnecessary in TL texts. The strategy is of great importance because if ST texts are translated word by word, the readability of the translation will probably be greatly affected [7]. Hence, omission is an efficient strategy for translating fuzzy expressions in English news leads, which can help render concise and clear translations and improve readability. Here is an example:

The impact of the Trump administration's threats to choke Huawei Technologies Co. reverberated across the global supply chain on Monday, hitting some of the biggest component-makers (Bloomberg, May 23, 2019).

本周一，特朗普政府威胁扼杀华为技术有限公司一事引发全球供应链震荡，波及众多顶级零部件制造商。

In this news lead, the fuzzy expression "the impact" is omitted during the process of translation because the omission of it in TL makes no difference on target readers' understanding about the sentence and meanwhile helps render a more concise translation, which conforms to the reading habits of target readers. Here is another example:

In the life of the universe, 12 years is nothing. In the life of a network sitcom, it's an eternity.

在茫茫宇宙中，12年不过弹指一瞬。但对于一部网络情景喜剧而言，12年就是永恒。

In this news lead, the fuzzy expression "the life" has been omitted in TL since if it is rendered, the translation will be redundant and cause translationese. And the hedge "an" is an indefinite article in English, but in the E-C translation, it is often omitted to cater to Chinese readers' reading habits.

## V. CONCLUSION

Fuzziness, a common as well as significant phenomenon in human natural languages, has its distinct and irreplaceable functions in language use. Owing to its special functions in English news leads as discussed above, fuzziness is extensively used. Accordingly, how to appropriately translate the fuzzy language from SL into TL is one of the great concerns of translators. The thesis, based on the English news leads extracted from various foreign journals, explores four strategies for translating fuzzy language in English news leads: the strategy of equivalence, the strategy of conversion, the strategy of expansion and the strategy of omission. And the thesis adopts Newmark's communicative translation theory as the criterion for evaluating the translations since the theory puts the target readers' response and the translations' communicative function on the top concerns, which is exactly the goal of English news leads translation.

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