# Features and Translation Strategies of English News Headlines

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**Abstract.** News headline plays a significant part in various news, therefore news headline, especially its E-C translation, is drawing more attention. This thesis attempts to probe into the translation of English news headlines from the perspective of Communicative Translation and Semantic Translation in quest of efficient ways to accurately transmit information and retain as many cultural characteristics of the original headlines as possible. In this thesis, the author makes a thorough analysis of English news headlines on four levels, namely, the lexical, the grammatical, the rhetorical and the cultural. Based upon this analysis, the author points out that Communicative Translation is an appropriate option to handle the translation of English news headlines featuring lexical and grammatical characteristics since they are closely affiliated with information transmission. While dealing with the rhetorical and cultural features of English news headlines, translators can adopt Semantic Translation since they reflect the linguistic style and cultural elements of the original news headlines. In practical translation, the author holds that Communicative Translation and Semantic Translation cannot be employed separately. Only when the translator keeps both of them in a harmonious way can the translation be successful.

Since the implementation of the reform and opening-up policies, Chinese people have gained more chances to communicate with other countries and regions in the world, so the translation of news headlines deserves special attention.

Based upon the past achievements, the current author attempts to make a comprehensive investigation of English news headlines and then probe into their translation from the perspective of Newmark's Communicative Translation and Semantic Translation theory in quest of efficient ways to accurately transmit information and retain as many cultural characteristics of original headlines as possible. The author points out that Communicative Translation is an appropriate option to handle the translation of English news headlines featuring lexical and grammatical characteristics since they are closely affiliated with information transmission. While dealing with the rhetorical and cultural features of English news headlines, translators can adopt Semantic Translation since they reflect the linguistic style and cultural elements of the original news headlines. In practical translation process, the author holds that Communicative Translation and Semantic Translation cannot be employed separately, or neither of them can be exclusively treated as an alternative for the other. Only if the translator keeps both of them in a harmonious way would the translation be successful.

## Features of News Headlines

Generally, headlines are classified into single-deck headlines and multi-deck headlines, whose features are as the following:

**The Lexical Features of News Headlines.** Midget words, especially nouns, are favored by news headlines, such as *Energy savers*, *Hi-tech Project Highlights 5 Areas* etc.

Vogue words mushroom with the progression of society, for example, Internetese, bio-chip, *American Online: Often Down, Never Out*

Abbreviations (or acronyms) and numerical words are used in a large scale. For example, expo, com'l, UNSC, *WTC Flag Returned to NY Delegation* (WTC=the World Trade Centre, NY=New York), QE2 may subs' target (QE2=Queen Elizabeth II; subs=submarines).

**The Grammatical Features of News Headlines.** It is a common practice for English news headlines to omit certain elements to achieve syntactical terseness. Function words like articles, prepositions, conjunctions and pronouns are often omitted and occasionally substantives such as

noun, verb can be also eliminated.

*Forecast of Mexican Quake Accurate, But ignored* (= <u>the</u> Forecast of Mexican Quake Accurate, But <u>It</u> I<u>s</u> Ignored)

*Ten Die in Kashmir Tempe Attack* (= Ten <u>People</u> Die in the Kashmir Temple Attack)

**The Rhetorical Features of News Headlines.** Rhetorical devices including metaphor, pun, alliteration, repetition, contrast etc. are widely used which are aimed at creating musical sound as well as vivid images to enable the readers to obtain spiritual enjoyment.

*The New Beetle Hits Town* (metaphor)

*Egg Talks: Agricultural Advisers Meet* (pun)

*Desperate Need, desperate deed* (rhyme)

*Overfed, Overpaid, Over-sexed And Over Here!* (repetition)

**The Cultural Features of News Headlines.** Language is the carrier of culture. News, as a practical text genre, inevitably bears cultural characteristics of a certain country or nation. English news headlines are bound with western cultural elements: the unique ideology, values, customs, etc. Cultural features are typically reflected in the following aspects:

First, quite a few English news headlines are derived from English idioms or allusions. For example,

*For many in cinema, <u>all roads led to wilder</u>*

"All roads led to Wilder" is adapted from the English idiom "all roads lead to Rome". Billy Wilder is a famous American movie director. The adapted idiom used here means for all of his movie fans, Wilder's movies are forever accessible and memorable.

*To Buy or not to Buy*

It is instantly recognizable that the headline is composed from the renowned quotation in Shakespeare's tragedy *Hamlet*. Here, the headline is used to depict stock investors' conflicting minds.

Secondly, tropes in English news headlines bear unique associations due to cultural influence. "Hawk" and "dove" refer to the uncompromising and conciliatory political tendencies respectively. Another pair of tropes is "donkey" and "elephant", which are symbols of American Democratic Party and Republican Party.

*A fund-raising dinner held for <u>fat cats</u>*

Fat cats here refer to magnates contributing funds to support elections in western countries.

Slang or dialectical expressions are often adopted to cater for a specific readership.

<u>Cops</u>*: Man Wanted in N.J. Arrested* (policemen)

*Has Packaging <u>Gone Bananas</u>?* (to become very angry, crazy and silly)


## Translation Strategies of News Headlines from the Perspective of CT & ST

Taking into account other important facets of translation such as the translator's purpose, the nature of readership and text typology, Newmark develops two modes of translation, namely, Communicative Translation and Semantic Translation, which are believed to be more practical than those idealized discussions on translation methods.   This thesis has proposed only two methods of translation that are appropriate to any text: (a) Communicative Translation, where the translator attempts to produce the same effect on the TL (Target Language) readers as was produced by the original on the SL (Source Language) readers, and (b) Semantic Translation, where the translator attempts, within the bare syntactic and semantic constraints of the TL, to reproduce the precise contextual meaning of the author (Newmark, 2001b:22). As this definition indicates, Communicative Translation focuses essentially upon the comprehension and response of TL receptors while Semantic Translation centers around the semantic content of the SL texts.

The language of news headlines presents unique characteristics on the lexical, grammatical, rhetorical and cultural levels. In this section, the author will carry out the translation of English news headlines from the four levels accordingly.

Lexis is a very basic and important device to help achieve the brevity effect of news headlines. The wide use of midget words, abbreviations, acronyms and coinages in English news headlines are

all intended for that purpose.

Midget words are widely used in news headlines writing in order to fit into the limited headline space. Furthermore, midget words have much larger semantic category, and are also more lively and flexible.

we can adopt Communicative Translation because the purpose of using midget words coincides with the features of Communicative Translation. Communicative Translation is likely to be smoother, simpler, clearer, more direct and easier to read.

Besides the midget words, in order to save more space and achieve briefness, abbreviations and acronyms are also widely used in English news headlines.

Abbreviation refers to the clippings only to keep the first part, the middle part or the ending part of the original words, while the rest parts are shortened or clipped away for the sake of saving space.

It requires translators to be familiar with the journalistic conventions. When translating, translators should turn to Communicative Translation since it's targeted at readership which requires that more emphasis should be put on information transmission rather than the retaining of the original form.

When translating headlines with acronyms, the translator should not leave acronyms to the readers to figure out their meanings. Instead, it's their job to tell the potential readers their exact meanings.

In order to achieve the purpose of highlighting completely the points of a piece of news in limited space, editors not only choose words for their brevity and dramatic quality but also use very condensed structures. Thus headlines usually have a set of distinctive grammatical rules which are totally different from the common grammar.

So, it's a common practice for English news headlines to omit certain elements to achieve syntactical terseness. Function words like articles, prepositions, conjunctions and pronouns are often omitted and occasionally substantives such as nouns, verbs can also be eliminated.

In dealing with news headlines characterized by omission, translators should focus on translating information words since the function words generally enjoy no substantial meanings and what roles they play just remain in the grammatical dimension. As for the omission of nouns, for better understanding, some words shall be added in the translating process.

The flexible use of tense is another distinctive grammatical feature of news report, which can be best manifested in headlines. "In headlines, present tense, which

is also called journalistic present tense, is widely used to indicate the events that happened in the past. The function of such device is the same as that of historical present tense in literature works, which is to create a sense of immediacy and leave readers a sense of reality" (Xu Mingwu, 2003: 226).

According to the investigation by Professor Zhang Jian, three tenses are usually used in headlines: the simple present tense, the simple future tense and the present progressive tense. (Zhang Jian, 1 994: 5)

To sum up, Communicative Translation is suggested to handle the translation of English news headlines featuring unique characteristics on the lexical and grammatical levels.

A fresh and appropriate rhetoric device will more often than not make the statement lively, impressive and interesting. Since translators must ensure the faithful information transmission on the one hand and also reserve the rhetorical features of headlines on the other hand, translators should use Communicative and Semantic Translation alternately in dealing with the translation of headlines characterized by rhetoric devices.

In news headlines translation, Communicative Translation could retain the original denotation of the headline while explaining the connotation that target language readers need to know. Before dealing with the rhetoric devices, translators should do some preliminary work such as searching for the background knowledge about the report, the journalist's viewpoint about the event. Based upon the preliminary work, translators can then accurately figure out the connotation of the devices and then try to find equivalent Chinese devices to reproduce the effect obtained by original readers on

our Chinese readers.

Written at the author's linguistic level, semantic translation can help recreate the precise flavor and tone of the original text. In practical translation, translators should first conduct an in-depth research on that rhetoric device, figuring out their connotations in the news context and comparing them with Chinese rhetorical.

Rhythm is the most-widely-used rhetorical device in writing headlines because both reporters and editors attempt to leave readers a deep impression at their very first sight of the news. And rhythm is just a proper means to fulfill this purpose because it can produce a special sound effect when read, which will in turn arouse readers' desire to finish the news. Generally speaking, rhythm falls into two categories: alliteration and rhyme.

"Alliteration is a device that repeats the same sound at frequent intervals and since the sound repeated is usually the initial consonant, it's also called front rhythm" (Feng Cuihua, 1983: 91).

"Pun is the use of a word in such a way as to suggest two or more meanings or different associations, or the use of two or more words of the same or nearly the same sound with different meanings. In this way, a humorous effect can be produced." (Feng Cuihua, 1983:91) News headline editors often employ this device in their news writing because there are many words in English language which look or sound alike, but have different senses, or connotations. If cleverly combined, these words will produce all unexpected effects.

"Metonymy is the act of referring to something by the name of something else that is closely connected with it." (Homby, 2004:1094) Journalists and news reporters use metonymy frequently and are constantly creating new substitutes since it can express briefly and effectively what would otherwise require a whole clause or sentence.

Parody is to imitate any of the well-known sayings, idioms, proverbs, etc. In main structure while changing one or more words so as to achieve certain effects like humorous, sarcastic, more persuasive, etc. It wins great favor of headline writers for their witty and humorous effect.

Antithesis means sharply contrasting ideas are juxtaposed in a balanced or parallel phrase or grammatical structure. Employing antithesis in headlines can make headlines vivid and impressive. For the readers, they can understand two parts well by contrasting the two extremes.

To conclude, headlines translation must be based on the precise understanding of the news content. With the emphasis on its readability of the translated version, translators should not rigidly stick to the original rhetoric devices. Instead they should make any necessary changes and adopt different and proper translation techniques.

In the translation of news headlines translators should also be aware of the cultural dements and adopt Communicative and Semantic Translation alternately according to the distance between the source language culture and the target language culture. Communicative Translation is subject to target culture which means translator should clarify those cultural dements in source language text that may cause ambiguity and misunderstanding for target language readers, and thus some source language cultural elements maybe sacrificed for the sake of easy understanding. The cultural elements transplanted from source culture should be compatible with target language culture.

In contrast to Communicative Translation, Semantic Translation is subject to source culture, which means translator needs to preserve as much as possible cultural elements in source language text, such as figures of speech, idioms, slang and so on, and give particular notes or explanations to those blurring or ambiguous cultural elements as necessary. In this way, readers can get to know a foreign culture which is one of the goals that readers expect to reach through reading international news.

To sum up, in practical translation, if translators can find in Chinese an expression that is completely or almost equivalent to the English one, Semantic Translation is advisable, they can just substitute the Chinese one for the English one. However, if they cannot find corresponding cultural expressions in Chinese, Communicative Translation is suggested. That is, translators can boldly use newly coined Chinese words or expressions to retain the original flavor and meanwhile provide supplementary information in case Chinese readers may misunderstand them.

## Conclusion

To sum up, this thesis makes an attempt to apply Newmark's CT and ST theory to news headlines translation. In this way, the translation practice is guided by theory and the quality of the translated news headlines can be improved. However, this thesis is far from being perfect, there is still much room for further improvement. Firstly, the examples need more comprehensive and in-depth analysis and more perfect translations should be attempted. Secondly, due to the limited space and time, only some major distinctive linguistic, rhetoric and cultural elements are discussed, other elements should also be touched in future study.

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