

# *On Translation of News Lead from the Perspective of Functional Equivalence*

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**Abstract:** Since the implementation of the reform and open-up policy, news translation becomes an indispensable activity in Chinese daily life. Among different kinds of inter-cultural communications, news translation is an important field of translation research. Among different parts of news discourse, the lead is the most distinctive and important part. It is positioned at the top of news, as not only a summary of the whole news but also a “springboard” to the following story. Thus, lead translation becomes a challenge to translators. Based on the researches of previous scholars, the author tries to analyze and figure out that news leads translation is a translation with its unique features which calls for much more efforts and accuracy to narrow the cultural gap and achieve acceptable translation and effective communication.

## **1. Introduction**

News reports served as one of the most influential mass media, they not only transmit news, but also spread views. They influence society with public tastes, morals and standards. And the lead as the core gives a highly concise summary of the news.

Usually, news leads are the first or two paragraph of the news and not very long and complex. Translation of being elegant in form and rich in content can not only attract the readers but also be meaningful and thought-provoking as an art. So, when translating news leads, we should get to know the mood of the whole news first, and then we must get familiar with the translation theory and principles, grasp the translating skills and fathom the wordings. In a word, it demands the translator’s consideration and investigation.

So, this thesis endeavors to discuss E-C news leads translation form. In this thesis, we will deal with its translation by applying Nida’s translation theory of Functional Equivalence.

## **2. Overview of News Lead**

According to different standards, news lead can be divided into different kinds. On the basis of temporally, there are direct lead and delayed lead. On the basis of relation with the fact, there are summary lead, descriptive lead, criticism lead, suspense lead and show-window lead. There are also other leads: quotation leads, question leads, personal leads, contrast leads, blind identification leads, anecdotal lead.

Usually, people may spend minutes to scan the whole news if the news lead is attractive. So the

news lead should supply enough information and attract readers in limited words. That requires the news lead concise and summary. The conciseness feature of English news lead determines the three language features: First, the omission of some grammatical words; Second, various short form words' used; third, tense and voice on special use. The features will be combined with examples in the following paragraph, and all the examples come from Zhong Lan[1]

Omission is not only a most simple expression, but also a most concise means. Although some parts of the grammatical structure have been omitted, the sentence can still show its complete meaning. However, if ignoring the management of the omission part in news lead translation, it will be likely to cause misleading meaning or even totally different from its original meaning. So a skillful translator should be more careful to the omission part, and be sure not to get a wrong understanding of the whole meaning and cause unnecessary mistakes.

(1) Crown Word Omitted

e.g. 37 killed in Italian plane crash (=37 killed in *an* Italian plane crash)

一架意大利飞机失事,37人丧生

(2) Verbs Omitted

e.g. Courses on Practical Skilled Popular with Students (= Course on Practical Skill Remain Popular with Students)

实用技能课程仍受学生欢迎

(3) Pronouns Omitted

e.g. Irish group kills ex-chief (= An Irish group kills *its* ex-chief)

一爱尔兰团体杀死前首领

(4) Auxiliary Verbs Omitted

e.g. Moscow's food prices soaring (= Moscow's food prices *are* soaring)

莫斯科食品价格猛涨

(5) Conjunction Omitted

e.g. Belgium supports francs, denies it will quit "snake" (= Belgium supports francs *and* denies it will quit "snake")

比利时支持法郎,否认将退出"蛇形行动"

From all the examples of omission we can observe that there are two methods to manage the omission part of the news lead: one is to supplement, the other is to reserve. The specific treatment principle is to make the translation accurate with the Chinese usage. Besides, to translate this kind of leads, the translator should use concise and accurate words to keep the original style of the lead.

Short form words are often used in English news lead because they can save space. People often get information through news lead, thus news lead should contain as more sufficient information as possible. Dealing with these short form words, the key method to translate the news lead is have a correct understanding of the superficial and implicative meaning of these words.

(1) Monosyllabic Words

e.g. Australia makes *bid* to lure more Asian tourist (bid= attempt, endeavor )

澳大利亚力图吸引更多的亚洲游客

(2) Acronyms

e.g. PC, Fax sales expected to soar ( PC= personal computer)

个人电脑,传真机销售有望猛增

(3) Abbreviations

e.g. Africa to create *telecoms* market ( telecom= telecommunication)

非洲将创建电信市场

Though all of those words seem to be simple and easy, they contain various kinds of meanings. To translate those words are not an easy job. It's requiring the translator to master the

idiomatic expressions of the target language.

The simple feature of language of news lead can also be reflected by special use of tense and voice. The use of tense in English news lead is simple and flexible. First of all, when link verb in news lead is to point out tense and voice, it has often been omitted. Secondly, present tense is widely used in news lead, it can express past, now and future.

(1) Past Tense Expresses in Present Tense

e.g. UC Journalism *suffers* rough year in credibility

一年来美国新闻界信誉下降

(2) Future Tense Expresses in Infinitive

e.g. Largest Chinese trade delegation *to visit* US in Nev.

最大的中国贸易代表团将于 11 月访美

(3) Present Tense/ Future Tense Expresses in the Present Participle

e.g. Centre to forecast air quality in major cities *starting* in June

空气质量预报中心将于 6 月始向多个城市发布

(4) Passive Voice Expresses in the Past Participle

e.g. US car makers *viewed* as threat by Europeans

美国汽车制造商被欧洲人视为威胁

In dealing with the translation work of the tense and voice in English news lead, we would better pay more attention, in order not to be limited by its superficial form. We should get an exact understanding of the real meaning of tense and voice in the news lead first, and then translate it.

### 3. Differences between English and Chinese News Lead

To translate English news lead into Chinese, there are two basic factors to be emphasized: word order differences between English and Chinese, expressions differences between English and Chinese.

(1) Word Order Differences between English and Chinese

Each language has its unique discourse organization principle. Though both of the English and Chinese news leads are emphasizing concise and comprehensive, the word order of news lead has great differences. In Chinese news, the topic of news often goes after relevant information and source of information. It has a developing process from secondary to primary, from background to mission, from relevant information to topic. But in English news, topic always comes before relevant information. The order of English news lead is the topic comes first, then comes to the source of information.

For example:

Women with a university education are choosing to have children later in life, a British research reveals.[2]

英国一调查表明,上过大学的女性通常选择晚育.

Comparing this English news lead and Chinese news lead, we can see that the source of information comes first in Chinese news lead but comes out in the end of English news lead.

(2) Expressions Differences between English and Chinese

To English news leads, English sentence pay more attention to the use of the subject and prefer to use impersonal structures than Chinese does. Chinese sentence prefers to use personal subject but seldom use subject.

The expression of positive and negative meaning between English and Chinese is totally different. In English, people use “never”, “not”, “no” to express negative meaning, but in Chinese, people use “不”, “非”, “无” to express it. However, those words are not equivalent in the E-C translation.

English stress on hypotaxis, while Chinese stress on parataxis. English sentences tend to use conjunctive words to express and link every relevant part of the sentence together. However, Chinese sentences are always simple and explicit, stress on smooth and coherence of the meaning, seldom use conjunctive words.

#### **4. Nida's Translation Theory of Functional Equivalence**

Eugene Nida's translation theory has been considered as a tremendous influence on the translation studies in both western countries and Asian countries, especially in China. It is undeniable that Nida's translation theory has a great influence in China, and has brought fresh air and inject new blood to Chinese translation studies.

##### **(1) Dynamic Equivalence /Functional Equivalence**

"Dynamic equivalence" is Nida's great contribution to translation studies. The core of Nida's translation theory is "Dynamic equivalence". But after the mid-1980s, we used "Functional equivalence" to replace "Dynamic equivalence".

In 1990s, levels of the minimal level and the maximal level was set to divide Functional Equivalence. The former is defined as "when readers read a translated text ,they should able to comprehend its point and they could image of how the original readers of the text must have understood and appreciated it". The latter is described as "when readers read a translated text,they should able to understand and appreciate it in essentially the same manner as the original readers did".[3]

##### **(2) Nature of Functional Equivalence**

In Nida's theory he mainly emphasized the importance of the receptor's role from all the above of functional equivalence. This made it totally different from the traditional translation theories, which often focus on verbal comparison between the translation and its original text. Thus, functional equivalence is highlight receptor's response as its nature.

##### **(3) Values of Functional Equivalence**

The concept of "functional equivalence" has a far-reaching influence to the entire translation world. Some scholars thought that general translation practice can be guided by Nida's functional equivalence. For example, Knoller says that "dynamic/ functional equivalence" tends to guide all other translation principles. [4] Jin Di claims that the idea of dynamic/functional equivalence, is applicable to all translation practice.[5] With so much support of translation theorists, we can see that Nida's concept of "functional equivalence" earns a highly fame.

#### **5. Translation Process and Strategies Guided by Nida's Translation Theory of Functional**

As it is known to all, source text and target text are two different elements which have no choice but to mention in any form of translation. Translation theorist Eugene Nida stressed many times that the absolute equivalence in translation is not exist.

The translator is required to act consciously in accordance with the receptor language. It may be adaptation to the receptor culture, but it may also be to acquaint the receptor with the source culture. From the above chapter and according to Nida's translation theory, we can see both news lead translation and Nida's functional equivalence stress on reader response. Therefore, Nida's translation theory, especially functional equivalence is applicable to achieve ideal news lead translation.

The meaning of news lead is restricted by the original lead. Since news lead is to motivate the reader's interests and summarize the whole discourse. Translator is required to do the translation good, so they need to follow the steps and strategies of news lead translation with all-sided consideration. In the following parts, three steps and two strategies are suggested.

## 6. Translation Process

### (1) Complete Understanding and Analysis

On the basis of Nida's translation theory, translation is reproducing what the original text writer means. For getting a better understanding, the translator should get to know the whole news story and the context. When we faced a very difficult structure or unfamiliar words in the news lead, the translator should consult the dictionary and deliberate it repeatedly.

To do detailed analysis is also an important step for translator to do translate, for we know that the purpose of journalist's writing a lead is to attract readers to read the following news story. News lead has an important function to inform readers various information. So a competent translator should analyze the implications of the news lead. "Meaning analysis" is a method that contains the semantic and the word meaning analysis. After analysis, the original text can be translated into Chinese in an appropriate way.

### (2) Restructuring

News lead gathers the most important factor of news. In general, both English and Chinese news lead adopt identical factors, but the way those factors combined into sentences is different. The topic often comes in first term before relevant information in English news lead. In other words, English news lead often place the most valuable content which dominate the syntax structure at the beginning. So, before translating, the reorganization of priority of the valuable about the news is a very important skill to translators. In Chinese news lead, the topic or the most valuable content is often place after relevant information. To translate English news lead into Chinese, translator should restructure the structure of the lead, prepose the relevant information.

### (3) Check Up

Compared with the above steps, check up is also a typical step to embody Nida's functional equivalence theory. Check up gives translators the chance to rethink and reconsider the translation work. Through the process of check up, translators can get their ideas into shape. Those unacceptable or uneasy natural and cultural background to readers can be wrote into acceptable one which adapt the writing style to the target language. With the functional equivalence theory, the equivalence in responses of readers is what is pursued in the end.

### (4) Translation Strategies

Although we adopt the translation process of news lead above, in the practice of translation we may also find that now and then some words in their usual senses and structures are very difficult to deal with because of the disparity between English and Chinese. In this case, we have to resort some special strategies of translation.

### (5) Literal Translation Vs. Compile Translation

Since there are natural and cultural differences between English and Chinese, there is different logic of writing news lead in these two languages. Dealing with English news leads that first supply the general statement in the first paragraph, then supply the specific information in the following paragraph, we can adopt these two methods: literal translation and compile translation. To adopt literal translation is to transform the leads in turn by the natural order. To adopt compile translation is to translate and arrange the leads according to Chinese writing style.

### (6) Passive Voice to Active Voice

English news lead used a lot of passive voices while they are seldom used in the Chinese news lead. Passive voices sentences are unacceptable to Chinese writing style and reading habit. Therefore, confronted with a passive-voiced English lead, translator should restructure it into an active-voiced Chinese lead.

To sum up, there are some differences between English and Chinese news lead in writing style and expression due to differences in language and culture. To make sure the completely of the

content of the original English news lead, the translator should adopt the theory and free from literal limitation of the structure. Therefore, these three steps and two strategies are suggested in the thesis to deal with the differences and difficulties of the news lead translation.

## 7. Conclusion

According to the functional equivalence, we can conclude that the reader's response is vital in lead writing, and it should also be vital in the translation of lead. Furthermore, the original text that we translated should follow the key function and provide the target readers with easy acceptable and useful information according to their local culture. Then there comes out the Nida's translation theory of functional equivalence which is suitable for the English-Chinese news lead translation.

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