

Original Paper

Translation of Government Portal News from an International Communication Perspective: A Case Study

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Abstract

The government portal in a foreign language is an important communication platform for improving city image and promoting international exchanges. News translation for the portal is in nature a communication act. To achieve good communication effect, Lasswell's 5Ws model can serve as useful guidance. In the translation process, translators need to familiarize themselves with the differences between news in English and news in Chinese and translate with an initiator-awareness so as to ensure correct translation of political expressions, expressions on China's stand and meaning conveyed in the original Chinese news, with an target-reader awareness so as to decide what to translate and translate in a way that is readable and acceptable to target readers, and with a communication-effect awareness so as to increase cognitive alignment in target language readers.

Keywords

news translation, 5Ws model, initiator-awareness, target-reader awareness, communication-effect awareness

1. Introduction

News is a significant window through which the international community gets to know about and understands China. According to Si Xianzhu, news of foreign-related news agencies in China like Chinadaily, Xinhua News and CGTN are actually translations of Chinese news based on certain rules and procedures, and English news of these institutions are translation products of institutional translation (Si, 2020). To translate the Chinese news purely under the guidance of translation theories does not suffice the goal of communicating since what is involved in the translation process is not only the shift between languages but also the purpose of translation, the media, the client, the target readers, etc., which are basic elements of a communication act, and it is better to introduce communication theories since all elements on the communication chain have an effect on the outcome.

2. The 5Ws Model

In his paper *The Structure and Function of Communication in Society* published in 1948, Lasswell proposed his communication model—the “5Ws” model. The term “5Ws” defines the research scope and basic content of communication studies, and represents the five elements in the process of communication, which are “who”, “say what”, “in which channel”, “to whom”, “with what effects”. “Who” refers to the commissioner or the initiator. The commissioner or the initiator can be an individual or an institution or a group. “Says what” refers to the content to be disseminated. “In which channel” refers to the medium that the commissioner or the initiator makes use of to convey information, which can be the newspaper, the television, the Internet, the applet, etc. “To whom” means the audience, which is the object of communication, including readers, listeners, and audiences. “With what effects” refers to the impact of information on the audience after they receive it, as well as the audience’s response to the information. These five elements also constitute the five basic contents of communication studies, including control research, content research, media research, audience research, and effect research.

The communication process of a message, a book, etc. involves “who (commissioner/initiator)”, “says what (content)”, “in which channel (medium)”, “to whom (audience)” and “with what effect (effect)”. The elements involved in the process of a translated text reaching the target readers is also very similar: the translation reaches the target readers through certain medium and gets feedback. Therefore, the process of news communication is almost the same as that of translated news with the only difference being different language environments. Therefore, to improve the effect of communication, translators need to take into consideration who controls the communication process, what is communicated, which channel is used, and who are the audiences so as to tell the true stories of China effectively and present a true, multi-dimensional, and panoramic view of China.

3. News Translation Under the Guidance of 5Ws

3.1 Introduction to the Yichang Government Portal

The government portal in a foreign language is an important platform for publicity and exchanges since firstly it can help improve government image by publicizing information on economy, society, culture, etc., and secondly it can help promote international exchanges and cooperation and provide better services for foreign friends in their integration into the local life. Many governments in China have government portals in foreign languages. The English version of Yichang’s government portal was started in 2013 with the goal of promoting the image of the city and meeting the needs of foreigners who lived and worked in the city or who intended to invest in or travel to the city.

Since the start of the portal translation project, the whole translation team has been earnest and diligent in fulfilling the required task. However, restricted by the portal management or lack of understanding of typical characteristics of English news, there exist some problems, such as inconsistent translation of proper nouns, mistranslation resulted from incorrect comprehension (Liu, 2018) and full-text translation without careful consideration of the features of the news to be translated and not so desirable readability

and acceptability of the translated news. Therefore, even though the translation work has won recognition of the management, there is still space for improvement as the 5Ws have to be given their due attention in the translation process.

3.2 5Ws-guided News Translation

Translation is not merely about the switch between two languages. If it is put in a professional context, the translator, the original writer, the commissioner/the initiator, the target readers, etc. do play their roles. And the translator, as an expert, cooperates with different parties and organizations involved in the translation act to ensure that the translation meets the agreed requirements of respective parties (Wolf, 2011). This sociological perspective of translation also applies to news translation since it is also a complicated act that involves almost the same parties aside from the translator. Therefore, to have a desirable communication effect, the translator needs to balance the varied requirements of the various parties. And the 5Ws model, though originally proposed in the field of communication, is applicable in news translation since news is translated to communicate, and the news translation act is in nature a communication act that involves basically the same 5Ws. In this sense, the awareness concerning the 5Ws are what news translators need to develop in order for the translated news to obtain desirable communication effect.

(1) Initiator awareness

As is mentioned above, news translation in China is institutional translation, whose purpose is to strengthen the soft power of the Chinese culture, shape national image and promote international exchanges. Against this backdrop, the basic principle in translating news should be “we take our own initiative” in giving out China’s voice. In the field of news translation, this principle is embodied firstly in the selection of the news to be translated, secondly in the political correctness that is displayed in the translated news, and thirdly in the full comprehension and correct translation of the meaning conveyed in Chinese.

The source text of government portal news is now mainly decided by the management of the portal, which is usually the local publicity department and the locally influential newspapers, so the direction of positive publicity is out of question. However, since certain words do have subtle implications, political correctness is what news translators have to bear in mind in the translation practice. For instance, the translation of “新型大国关系” should be “a new type of major country relationship” instead of “a new type of major power relationship” because China’s stand is that all countries, regardless of their size, strength or wealth, are all equal (Wang, 2014). In his book *From Translating the World to Translating China* (《从翻译世界到翻译中国》), Huang Youyi (2022) has noted many expressions that demand extra care in translation. For instance, “民主党派” can be translated into “other political parties” instead of “democratic parties” to avoid foreigners thinking that “民主党派” are opposition parties and the Communist Party of China is not a democratic party (pp. 4-5). “核污水” should certainly be translated into “nuclear-contaminated water” as this is the official translation used by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of China, and it represents China’s stand on the issue. The “we-take-our-own-initiative” principle

in publicity and the correct translation of these phrases reflect the firm stand of the translator and his/her professionalism. A qualified translator should have a good mastery of the correct translation of political expressions and expressions on China's stand in the international arena and also develop correct understanding based on intensive and extensive reading.

(2) Target-reader awareness

By target-reader awareness, the author means that news translation, while abiding the we-take-our-own-initiative principle, should also consider who the target readers are, what different backgrounds they come from, what different ways of thinking they have, what political stands they hold, and what news styles they have been accustomed to in terms of news content, language style, etc. Communication Studies shows that readers select what to read based on their interest and can only understand and remember things that they have an interest in. Therefore, in news translation, the translator can help decide what to translate and more importantly translate in a way that is readable and acceptable to target readers.

The management of government portals, lacking expertise and experience in cross-cultural communication, always believe that the more is presented, the more foreigners will know about the locality, neglecting the fact that readers read only what they are or might be interested in. Cramming information into readers is certainly not a wise approach as it might cause negative effect. For instance, there was once a translation task for the two pieces of news: “宜昌自贸片区党建工作入选全国自贸片区党建创新典型案例” and “宜昌高新区政务服务窗口人员持证上岗”. By reading through these two pieces of news, one can easily find that the Party construction work of a free trade area in the first news might be hardly understandable to foreigners. In the second piece of news, those who are on the job should certainly be qualified for their positions, otherwise, why are they hired? Similar news reports which are suitable for publicity in China and to Chinese readers but not that appropriate for foreign readers do sometimes appear, therefore, translators and related management need to make a distinguish between domestic publicity and overseas publicity so as to take the first step regarding what to translate right.

What is of equal importance is the way to translate. As is mentioned above, the news is usually written in Chinese, so it is usually written in a Chinese way. However, there exist huge differences between English news and Chinese news in aspects of the headline, the lead and the body. According to Zhang Jian (2016), headlines of English news and Chinese news differ in form, news focus, wording and tense (p. 21). There is usually one horizontal line in an English headline which emphasizes the focus of the news with concise words. However, a Chinese headline usually comes out in a vertical multi-line way and the headline itself is a mini-story in fancy words. Since the headline serves the purposes of summarizing news focus and attracting readers' attention, much effort should be made in order to translate in a way that is foreigner reader-friendly.

Example: 湖光秋色

This is the title of a piece of picture news, which introduces the ecological improvement of Taojiahu Lake in Yichang City. If it is translated literally, the readers will be at a loss as to what it is about and which

place is this, and some might even think this is an unrelated picture. If it is translated into “Taojiah Lake in Autumn Sunshine” (“the” is omitted as it is often the case in translating headlines), with the help of the picture, the readers will be instantly captivated by the picturesque scenery, which will ignite their desire to reader further and even inspire an impulsive urge to visit. In the author’s translation practice for the portal, many Chinese titles of picture news come out with fancy and unsubstantial titles, and their translation should certainly involve the consideration for the target readers.

Example: 宜昌城市文化 IP 打造及运营专题讲座举行
共同讲好屈原故事宜昌故事

This is the two-line title of the news on the creation of Yichang’s cultural IP, especially the Qu Yuan IP. Unlike English news titles that only highlight the most important information, the two-line Chinese title tries to show as much information as possible. In this piece of hard news, the most important fact is the convening of the symposium instead of the purpose of the symposium, which is to some extent self-evident. What’s more, based on the news content, “讲座” could be translated as “symposium” instead of “lecture” because the event was actually a meeting where experts shared their expertise and experience in creating influential images. “Special Symposium on Qu Yuan IP Held in Yichang” effectively conveys the core information while maintaining simplicity and professionalism, making it suitable for quickly informing readers about the news and arousing their interest.

The lead in a piece of Chinese hard news tries to showcase almost all the news elements (who, what, when, why, how and where) in a straight forward way, therefore, it is not rare to see the lead being as long as over 200 Chinese characters. However, news agencies in foreign countries like the Associated Press has stipulated that a news lead should be no more than 25 words. In addition, English news gives only a general statement in the lead to arouses the readers’ interest and proceed with more information in the news body (Liu, 2009, p. 29). Therefore, in translating the news lead, these differences should be given proper consideration and appropriate editing is of imperative importance.

Example. 近日，宜昌举行第六个中国医师节庆祝活动暨“最美健康守护者”致敬礼，表彰了一批优秀医务工作者，通过选树先进模范和示范标杆，进一步弘扬“敬佑生命、救死扶伤、甘于奉献、大爱无疆”的医学精神，推动在全社会广泛形成尊医重卫的良好氛围。

In this lead, the news elements are:

what—Yichang commended excellent doctors

when—recently

who—Yichang

whom—excellent doctors

why—to set models and create an atmosphere of respecting the doctors and public health services

how—a commending ceremony (known based on the pictures from the Internet)

The why part, 65 characters, half of the sentence, is something that readers can easily associate when they read a piece of news commending the doctors. So in this sense, there is no need to put this part in the lead, which usually has a length limit. What’s more, news facts in English news are arranged usually

in the descending order of importance, and the most significant information is put at the beginning, and the least important information is put at the end. Since the why part is self-evident, the translator can place it in a position that carries the least importance.

Based on what comes after the Chinese lead, it is easy to know that a total of 224 doctors were commended at the commending ceremony, and pictures online show the event took place on August 18 (Friday). Therefore, the translator can rewrite the lead into “224 doctors were commended at the celebration of the 6th Chinese Physicians’ Day on Friday” and proceed in the body part with more information. The reason why the honor of the “Most Beautiful Health Guardians” is omitted is that the author ascertained that it was not the theme of the event and this honorary title was bestowed only to ten excellent doctors, and the others were commended either as leading talents or excellent doctors. Hence, it is a wise practice to give this information in other forms like “the commending ceremony is held to pay tribute to the most beautiful health guardians” in appropriate places to make up for it not being translated in the lead.

From the discussion of the above lead we know that lead translation is sometimes not merely about translating, instead, it is rewriting based on the content of the news and the translator’s understanding of the conventional forms of leads in newspapers.

This rewriting or editing method is equally applicable to the translation of the body of the news, particularly when dealing with Chinese news articles that often include extensive details. “宜昌市规划建设 62 条生态清洁小流域” is quite an illustrative example. The entire news is 823 characters long, with detailed information about the definition and function of “ecological and clean small watersheds” (194 characters), and the names, locations, and project progress of some ecological and clean small watersheds (230 characters). Since it is difficult for foreign readers to locate these places and remember these names and the project progress of some projects, there is no need to translate them all out. Proper editing with a focus on the development of the protection of ecological and clean small watersheds and the government’s action plan in this aspect could achieve a more informative function.

Due to the restriction of length, only several examples for the translation of the title, the lead, and the news body are presented. However, in the author’s translation experience as a translator for the government portal, she has encountered many similar cases. Ways of editing may vary from translator to translator since every translator has his/her individual style, but if a good communication effect is the ultimate goal, the readers should always be a top factor affecting the decisions in the translation process.

(3) Communication-effect awareness

It is traditional practice that the management of the English version of the government portal assesses the translation work based on their standards over a certain period of time. The management of the Yichang Government Portal assess the quality of the translation mainly from the perspectives of faithfulness, consistent terminology and smooth language every year, and has rated the translation excellent every time, which is one proof of the effectiveness of communication. However, this assessment is done by the initiator. A more direct and effective method will be researching on audiences’ feedback.

Before the renovation of the website, the number of visits to the website was clearly displayed on the top right corner of the website, and there were usually more than 2000 clicks everyday. This proved that the English portal was a useful resource for foreigners living in Yichang or planning to come to Yichang. Another method to get readers' feedback is to collect data from foreigners living in the city through online tools, applets and interviews. As is found by the author, the majority of the foreigners interviewed (mainly international students and foreign teachers) are positive and supportive of the translation, saying that the portal helps them know the city better. It is for sure that there are other effective means of assessing the translation of government portals, what the author emphasizes is that the effect orientation is an awareness that translators of government portals should develop and it is what helps them understand users' needs, increase accuracy, optimize the language, and increase cognitive alignment in readers. Since there still lacks an existing standard that translators can follow in order to achieve better communication effect in news translation, it certainly is a good idea to learn from other fields like international communication, journalism and communication, etc.

4. Conclusion

The English governmental portal of a city is a miniature of a city, serving vital functions like information communication and city life guidance. It plays a crucial role in enhancing city image and promoting social, economic and people-to-people exchanges. The news translation on the portal has to not only represent what is conveyed in the original news in Chinese, but also present in a way that the foreign populace enjoy reading. The initiator of news translation and the news readers are not in conflict; rather, they depend on each other to tell rich and concrete local stories from a local perspective and thus present a panoramic view of the locality. In this sense, viewing news translation as a form of communication and prioritizing the parties and elements on the communication chain will ensure a good communication effect. Improving the quality of translation and effect of communication is an arduous and complex endeavor which requires the efforts of not only the translators but also those involved in the communication behaviour.

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