

## *Original Paper*

# A Study on the Translation of Informative Texts under the Perspective of Communicative and Semantic Translation Theories

Jiani Luo<sup>1\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Southwest University of Science and Technology, Mianyang, Sichuan, China

\* Jiani Luo, Southwest University of Science and Technology, Mianyang, Sichuan, China

Received: July 31, 2025

Accepted: August 18, 2025

Online Published: September 3, 2025

doi:10.22158/sll.v9n3p133

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.22158/sll.v9n3p133>

### **Abstract**

*This study employs Peter Newmark's communicative and semantic translation theories to analyze the informative texts produced by China International Communications Group (CICG), which reveals that translators combined communicative and semantic translation strategies to convey information and facilitate cross-cultural communication. For culture-specific terms and core philosophical concepts, semantic translation is employed to preserve cultural authenticity. For background information, historical context, and complex sentence structures, communicative translation strategies such as amplification, explanatory translation, and syntactic restructuring are applied to achieve informational accuracy and acceptability. The study offers a paradigm for the effective translation of culturally specific information from China and demonstrates the applicability of Newmark's communicative and semantic translation theories in guiding the translation of informative texts.*

### **Keywords**

*communicative translation, semantic translation, informative text, translation strategies*

## **1. Introduction**

Against the backdrop of increasingly frequent global cultural interactions, cultural exchange has become a vital pathway towards promoting international understanding and cooperation. As a core medium of cross-cultural communication, translation plays an increasingly critical role. Therefore, this study selects texts on traditional culture released by the China International Communications Group (CICG) as the research subject, given their authority and representativeness.

These texts cover themes such as chopsticks, Hanfu, paper-cutting, and tea culture, which qualify as informative texts as their primary function is to convey cultural facts while simultaneously accommodating the comprehension capacity of international readers. Thus, the translation of such materials entails a tension between cultural specificity and reader acceptability.

Therefore, this study employs Peter Newmark's theories of communicative translation and semantic translation as its analytical framework, which offers complementary strategies for translation: semantic translation emphasizes preserving the form and meaning of the source culture, while communicative translation focuses on the comprehensibility and fluency of the target text.

The purpose of this study is to examine how CICG translators apply different translation strategies based on communicative and semantic translation in rendering culturally rich informative texts through case analysis, and to evaluate their effectiveness in practice. And, the findings aim to provide both theoretical reference and practical insights for future translation.

## **2. Literature Review**

### *2.1 A Review of Text Typology Theory*

The discussion of text types in translation studies centers on the recognition that different texts serve different primary functions, and thus require adapted translation strategies. The foundational work in this area was systematically pioneered by the German functionalist scholar Katharina Reiss. In her 1971 work *Translation Criticism: The Potentials and Limitations* (Reiss, 2000), Reiss linked text function to translation strategy and proposed three main text types: the informative text, the expressive text, and the operative text.

Among these, the informative text primarily serves to convey facts, information, and opinions. It is characterized by markedly referential language, emphasizing objectivity and accuracy in content. This type commonly includes genres such as academic papers, news reports, and technical documentation. The expressive text focuses on conveying the author's emotions and aesthetic intentions, highlighting artistic expression in language. Literary works and poetry are typical examples of this category. The operative text, meanwhile, aims to induce a specific response or behaviour from the reader, emphasizing the persuasive function of language. It is commonly found in advertisements and promotional materials (Reiss, 2004).

Reiss particularly stressed that the translation of informative texts should ensure both the completeness and accuracy of information transmission, while also adapting the linguistic form to conform to the norms of the target language (Reiss, 2004).

Reiss's theory provided an objective framework for translation criticism based on text function, breaking away from the previous limitations of isolated comparisons of source and target language structures. This classification provided an important theoretical foundation for subsequent researchers, including Peter Newmark.

Building upon Reiss's theoretical foundation, the British translation theorist Peter Newmark further developed and refined the text typology theory. Newmark (Newmark, 1988) classified all texts into three major categories: expressive texts, informative texts and vocative texts.

He proposed a dual framework of semantic translation and communicative translation, establishing correspondences between these strategies and different text functions. Newmark argued that the translation of informative texts should prioritize a communicative translation strategy, placing special emphasis on reader comprehension and the efficiency of information transfer. Expressive texts, on the other hand, are more suited to semantic translation to maintain fidelity to the original author's style and textual form. Similarly, vocative texts primarily call for communicative translation but require greater attention to achieving the intended reader response. Newmark emphasized that when translating informative texts, the acceptability to the reader should be a precondition, and where necessary, adjustments to sentence structures and cultural terminology may be made to ensure effective communication of information.

Since its proposal, this type of theory has attracted extensive attention in the field of translation studies. Wu Ailing (Wu, 2005) systematically elaborated on the reception and development of Reiss's text typology theory in China, noting that this theory has provided an important functionalist analytical framework for the Chinese translation community. It has not only influenced the choice of translation strategies but also promoted functional-equivalence-based critical practice. Chinese scholars such as Chen Xiaowei (Chen, 1996) and Zhang Chunbai (Zhang, 2001) further applied this theory to the translation of texts in fields such as international publicity, scientific and technical literature, and literary works, demonstrating its strong theoretical adaptability and practical guidance. The study suggests that Reiss's typological theory has gradually fostered a localized critical paradigm in Chinese translation studies that emphasizes function, context, and reader response.

It is noteworthy that although both theorists share a high degree of homogeneity in their theoretical origins—each rooting their framework in Karl Bühler's threefold classification of language functions and establishing a connection between language functions and text types, thereby introducing a functionalist perspective to translation studies—their research orientations differ significantly. As Wang Yinquan and Ren Fang (Wang & Ren, 2009) point out, Reiss's contribution lies in her pioneering effort to construct a system of translation evaluation criteria based on textual functions, emphasizing that assessment standards should be tailored to the specific text type and its dominant function. In contrast, Newmark's work offers a more operational discussion of translation methods for various functional text types, most notably through the introduction of the core strategies of "semantic translation" and "communicative translation", which provide clear methodological guidance for translating different kinds of texts. Despite these differences in their approaches, the theoretical achievements of both together form the main framework of text typology, serving as an important theoretical basis for this study's subsequent selection of translation strategies based on text types.

## 2.2 *A Review of Newmark's Theories of Communicative and Semantic Translation*

Building on Reiss's text typology, the British translation theorist Peter Newmark further developed related theories and proposed his influential dual concepts of communicative translation and semantic translation in his book *Approaches to Translation* in 1981.

Newmark (Newmark, 2001) proposed that "semantic translation attempts to render, as closely as the semantic and syntactic structures of the second language allow, the exact contextual meaning of the original". Semantic translation requires the translator to adhere as closely as possible to the precise contextual meaning of the original within the semantic and syntactic constraints of the target language. It is particularly suitable for expressive texts (e.g., classic literary works, authoritative statements) and for culture-laden portions of informative texts where the form itself carries meaning.

In contrast, communicative translation attempts to produce on its readers an effect as close as possible to that obtained on the readers of the original (Newmark, 2001). It is target-reader-centered, pursuing fluency, naturalness, and conformity to target-language conventions. Communicative translation is particularly suitable for operative/vocative texts (e.g., advertisements, publicity) and for parts of informative texts where the primary goal is the clear and efficient transmission of information.

Newmark strongly emphasized that these two methods are not a binary opposition but a continuum of strategies. There is no one communicative nor one semantic method of translating a text—these are in fact widely overlapping bands of methods (Newmark, 2001). A competent translator must flexibly choose between them based on the function of specific passages, sentences, or even words.

It provides translators with a clear, practical, and flexible analytical framework, freeing them from the endless debate between "literal" and "free" translation. It makes clear that translation decisions are not based on personal preference but on a rational analysis of text function, authorial intention, and reader expectations.

Since its introduction to China, Peter Newmark's theories of communicative and semantic translation have exerted a profound influence on domestic translation studies. Chinese scholars have explored these theories from multiple dimensions, focusing mainly on their theoretical interpretation, application across different genres, and their suitability in translating Chinese culture for foreign audiences.

One of the important early tasks undertaken by domestic scholars was the systematic introduction and interpretation of the theory. Yang Shizhuo (Yang, 1989), in *A Brief Analysis of Newmark's Semantic Translation and Communicative Translation*, provided one of the early representative works that clearly outlined and commented on the theory. The study systematically analyzed the connotations, connections, and distinctions between this pair of core concepts, pointing out that semantic translation and communicative translation are not diametrically opposed but form a continuum. In actual translation practice, translators often need to integrate both strategies. This article laid an important foundation for the accurate understanding and application of the theory within Chinese academic circles.

In the study of Newmark's translation theory, Mao Ying (Mao, 2022) conducted an empirical exploration of the application of communicative translation in non-literary texts. The study pointed out that communicative translation is reader-effect centered and advocates techniques such as amplification and inversion to achieve fluency and acceptability in the target text. Its in-depth analysis of the principles and methods of communicative translation provides a typical example for understanding the dialectical relationship between "communicative" and "semantic" dimensions in Newmark's theory.

### 3. Case Analysis

#### 3.1 Text Analysis

The texts analyzed in this study were selected from the publicity materials of China International Communications Group (CICG), which mainly introduce four highly representative Chinese traditional cultural elements. The language of the text was concise with dense information, possessing both knowledge and cultural dissemination capabilities. Its primary aim is to objectively and accurately convey facts, history, and knowledge about Chinese culture to a global readership. Therefore, they are informative texts.

The semantic translation and communicative translation strategies proposed by Newmark are crucial guides for translation practice. Semantic translation is text-oriented and communicative translation is target-reader-centered.

#### 3.2 Semantic Translation

Semantic translation strategies are primarily used to handle culture-loaded terms and core cultural concepts, aiming to maximally preserve Chinese cultural characteristics and present the uniqueness of Chinese culture authentically to target readers.

For core concepts rooted in Chinese philosophy, history, and daily life, the translator primarily adopts strategies of literal translation or transliteration combined with literal translation.

#### Example 1:

ST: “阴阳”

TT: “yin and yang”

Rather than paraphrased as “the principle of opposites” or “the duality theory”. This translation goes beyond simple word-for-word correspondence; it is a profound act of cultural naming. It signifies that this concept originates from a unique Chinese philosophical system whose connotations cannot be fully captured by existing Western terminology. This approach strictly follows the semantic translation principle of being “source-text-centered”.

#### Example 2:

ST: “天圆地方”

TT: “heaven is round and earth is square”

It also reflects deep consideration in semantic translation. The translator fully retains the original

combination of images and resisting the temptation to adapt it into abstract expressions like “the traditional cosmology”. This approach does not ignore reader comprehension but aims to authentically showcase the unique expression of ancient Chinese cosmology—a way of thinking that materializes abstract philosophical concepts into geometric shapes. It faithfully reproduces the cultural imagery of the source language, embodying semantic translation’s respect for and preservation of cultural heterogeneity. This method creates a defamiliarization effect; the reader receives not a definition but a vivid cultural image, greatly preserving the features of the original text.

**Example 3:**

ST: “交领右衽”

TT: “jiaoling youren”

The transliteration part (“jiaoling youren”) is the core embodiment of semantic translation. It acknowledges the objective existence of cultural differences, refuses to use approximate English words that might cause loss of meaning, and instead creates a new signifier to establish an exclusive cultural label for it in the target language. This precisely prioritizes the faithful transmission of source culture information, aligning with the core concept of semantic translation: creating equivalents in the target language for unique source language concepts.

**Example 4:**

ST: 筷子的标准长度是七寸六分，代表人有七情六欲。

TT: The length of chopsticks is typically seven cun and six fen (approximately 7.66 inches), representing the seven emotions and six desires of human beings. The translator insists on using “cun” and “fen”, these uniquely Chinese units of length. The specific measurement “七寸六分” is itself a cultural symbol, whose value far exceeds the converted “7.66 inches”. Similarly, the translation retains the numbers “seven...six...” in “七情六欲”, ensuring the complete transmission of the numerical symbolism. It reflects an absolute respect for cultural details. The translator treats “cun/fen” and the numbers “seven/six” as incompressible cultural data that must be preserved in their original form. The parenthetical conversion (“approximately 7.66 inches”) serves as a supplementary communicative intent, but the primary information remains “seven cun and six fen”. This ensures that for readers familiar with “cun” and “fen”, the information is 100% accurate; for unfamiliar readers, they still receive the core message that “this is a specific measurement with special meaning”. This approach retains the form of the original while ensuring comprehensibility, representing a clever integration of semantic translation and communicative intent.

### 3.3 Communicative Translation

Communicative translation strategies are more widely used in this informative text, aiming to resolve cultural barriers and ensure information convey.

### 3.3.1 Context Adjustment

**Example 5:**

ST: “汉服文化随着古丝绸之路和人员往来而广泛传播，对处于儒家文化圈的朝鲜、日本、韩国、越南等国家产生了深远影响。”

TT: “Hanfu spread widely along the ancient Silk Road and through people-to-people exchanges, and left its mark especially on countries under the influence of Confucian culture, such as Korea, Japan, and Vietnam”.

The translator did not literally translate “儒家文化圈” as “the Confucian cultural circle”. Although “circle” might seem directly equivalent, in the English context it can easily evoke connotations of “closedness”, “exclusivity”, or “bloc” in a geopolitical sense, which might unintentionally reinforce the cultural divide between East and West, contradicting the text’s intended message of cultural exchange and influence. Therefore, the translator chose the expression “countries under the influence of Confucian culture”. This transforms a static, geographically zonal concept in the source culture into a dynamic concept describing a process of influence in the target culture. As discussed earlier, the core of Newmark’s communicative translation is being “reader-centered”. To achieve the communicative effect, the translator freely reconstructed the expression of this sentence, achieving the communicative purpose.

### 3.3.2 Amplification

**Example 6:**

ST: “意大利人利玛窦”

TT: “Italian missionary Matteo Ricci”

The translator did not mechanically translate it as “Italian Matteo Ricci” but added the core identity label “missionary”. In the cognitive context of Western readers, “missionary” is a concept with clear historical and cultural associations, often linked to knowledge dissemination and the history of East-West exchanges. Adding this identity instantly integrates the unfamiliar Chinese name “Matteo Ricci” into the Western reader’s own cultural and historical narrative framework, facilitating better understanding of the text and achieving the purpose of an informative text.

**Example 7:**

ST: “茶文化的集大成者陆羽”

TT: “the tea connoisseur Lu Yu”

Similarly, the translation of “陆羽” embodies this principle. The translator specifies his identity as “the tea connoisseur” rather than the vague “scholar” or “writer”. The word “Connoisseur” not only describes his actions but also defines his expert identity and social role. This provides an immediate, credible context for Western readers to understand why “The Classic of Tea” is “the world’s first monograph on tea culture”, allowing it to be accepted as an authoritative work rather than an ordinary book.

The purpose is not merely “supplementary explanation” but to quickly and accurately establish the cognitive framework necessary for target language readers to understand the figures and their historical contributions, significantly reducing the difficulty of decoding information. This is exemplary operativity of communicative translation aimed at achieving effective communication.

**Example 8:**

ST: 葫芦、莲花等图案象征多子多福。

TT: patterns of ... gourds (which sound similar to the Chinese characters fu and lu, meaning “happiness” and “good fortune”), and lotus flowers symbolize blessings and fertility.

The parenthetical amplification is a model of compensation strategy. The translator realizes that the homophonic cultural meaning of “葫芦” is a complete cultural blank for the target reader. Omitting it would permanently lose the cultural information; translating only the sound would be meaningless. For Chinese readers, the homophonic association of “葫芦” with “福禄” (happiness and prosperity) is basic cultural knowledge. But for Western readers, this is a complete cultural gap. Translating simply as “gourds” would completely lose the key cultural information: why do gourds symbolize good fortune? The translator here uses amplification: adding an explanation within parentheses that clearly illustrates the origin of its symbolic meaning—phonetic pun. This not only explains “gourd” itself but also reveals the important phenomenon of “homophonic auspiciousness” in Chinese culture to the reader. This is a typical strategy in communicative translation to ensure informational completeness and acceptability.

3.3.3 Restructuring

**Example 9:**

ST: 古代中国又被称为“华夏”，其中“华”字就蕴含了“服饰华美”之意。

TT: China was known as huaxia in ancient times, in which the character hua implies fine attire.

The translation adjusts the sentence structure, turning the clause “其中‘华’字...” into a non-restrictive relative clause “in which the character hua...” This makes the English sentence logically clearer and more coherent. This kind of restructuring is a common strategy in communicative translation, aimed at producing idiomatic target language output.

**Example 10:**

ST: 汉服文化不仅讲究审美，还要符合礼制，生动展现了“衣冠上国”“礼仪之邦”“锦绣中华”的美誉。

TT: In addition to a focus on aesthetics, Hanfu highlights the importance of ritual conformity, and vividly reflects China’s reputation as a nation that prizes proper and fine attire, values etiquette, and celebrates splendor and beauty.

The original text is a typical Chinese run-on sentence, connected paratactically, with the three four-character phrases “衣冠上国”，“礼仪之邦”，“锦绣中华” listed in parallel—imposing but highly condensed in meaning. The translator completely breaks the original sentence structure. First, logical connectors like “In addition to...” and “highlights the importance of...” clearly show the parallel



relationship between “aesthetics” and “ritual system”. Second, it extracts the deep meaning of the three idioms and transforms them into a long, English-compliant object clause: “a nation that prizes proper and fine attire (衣冠上国), values etiquette (礼仪之邦), and celebrates splendor and beauty (锦绣中华)”.

After this processing, the translation becomes logically clear and progressive, conforming to English readers’ preference for explicit logic and concrete explanation. It sacrifices the parallel structure and rhythm of the original but successfully and unambiguously conveys the core ideas of these three accolades, avoiding misunderstandings potentially caused by cultural compression, and achieves the optimal communicative effect.

#### **Example 11:**

ST: “包括茶史、茶俗、茶歌、茶礼、茶具、茶艺、茶文学等” (a list of 7 parallel “tea-X” structures)

TT: “encompassing... including tea drinking etiquette; customs, songs, and ceremonies associated with preparing and drinking tea; tea utensils; and tea-inspired art and literature”.

The translator does not mechanically list the seven concepts but performs a profound reorganization and categorization: First, merging the three concepts related to cultural practices—“茶俗, 茶歌, 茶礼” (tea customs, tea songs, tea etiquette)—into one sense group: “customs, songs, and ceremonies associated with preparing and drinking tea”. The phrase “associated with...” clearly establishes their connection to “tea”. Simultaneously, the superordinate term “tea drinking etiquette” cleverly covers part of the core meaning of “茶礼”. “tea-inspired art and literature” does not literally translate “茶文学” but uses the dynamic, poetic phrase “tea-inspired” to encompass all artistic and literary creations related to tea, resulting in more beautiful language.

Overall, this approach perfectly embodies the reader-centered principle of communicative translation, aiming to provide the target reader with a clearly structured, logical, and easily understandable introduction to the cultural system, rather than simply replicating the textual structure of the source language.

#### **4. Conclusion**

Through the analysis of the informative texts from the China International Communications Group (CICG), it becomes evident how the translator applies Newmark’s semantic and communicative translation theory to guide translation. Overall, the translation exhibits a characteristic predominance of communicative translation strategies, supplemented by semantic translation strategies.

For core cultural terms and concepts, the translator predominantly employs semantic translation (literal translation, transliteration) to preserve the authenticity and uniqueness of Chinese culture, thereby meeting the target readers’ expectations for engaging with “foreign” cultural knowledge. In contrast, when dealing with complex cultural connotations, background information, and textual logic, communicative translation strategies (free translation, amplification, syntactic restructuring) are

extensively used. Therefore, the approach not only disseminates the essence of Chinese culture but also accommodates the reception capacity of overseas readers, serving as an exemplary practice in translating informative texts.

## References

- Chen, X. W. (1996). On the Guiding Role of “Translation Function Theory” in Practical Text Translation. *Shanghai Science and Technology Translation*, (03), 9-12+16.
- Mao, Y. (2022). Research on Informational Text Translation under Communicative Translation Theory. *Foreign Trade & Economic Cooperation University*, (09), 94-97.
- Newmark, P. (1988). *A Textbook of Translation*. London: Prentice Hall.
- Newmark, P. (2001). *Approaches to Translation*. Shanghai: Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press.
- Reiss, K. (2000). *Translation Criticism: The Potentials and Limitations* (E. F. Rhodes, Trans.). American Bible Society (Original work published 1971).
- Reiss, K. (2004). *Text Types, Translation Types and Translation Assessment*. Shanghai: Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press.
- Wang, Y. Q., & Ren, F. (2009). Significance of Text Type Theory in Translation Practice. *Crazy English (Teacher's Edition)*, (05), 122-126.
- Wu, A. L. (2005). Translation Typology and Textual Type Translation in China. *Journal of Nanjing University of Science and Technology (Social Sciences Edition)*, (05), 59-63.
- Yang, S. Z. (1989). A Brief Analysis of Newmark's Semantic Translation and Communicative Translation Theories. *Fujian Foreign Language*, (Z2), 68-71.  
DOI:10.19716/j.1672-4720.1989.z2.015
- Zhang, C. B. (2001). A Linguistic Model of Translation Criticism—: A Brief Review of “Translation Criticism—Its Potential and Limitations”. *Shanghai Science and Technology Translation*, (02), 1-4.