Chinese Translation of International Trade Terms
—A Corpus Based Study

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Being widely used in global trade, the translation of international trade terms is necessary. Major procedures in this article are as following: (1) collecting 750 international trade terms and their Chinese translations from dictionaries, journals and official websites related to international trade terms; (2) using Tmxmall to align the international trade terms and their Chinese translation to build a parallel corpus; (3) selecting 120 out of the 750 international trade terms through random sampling; (4) classifying the international trade terms into four types through POS-tagging in CLAWS5; (5) basing on the functional equivalence and summarizing the main translation methods of international trade terms. The result shows literal translation, free translation and combination of literal and free translation employed in the Chinese translation of international trade terms.

Keywords: international trade terms, Chinese translation, functional equivalence, corpus-based study

Introduction

With the deepening of economic globalization, the demand for international trade terms translation is increasing. International trade terms, belong to the category of Business English, are a part of English for Special Purposes. International trade terms used to be defined as a group of abbreviated terms in incoterms represented by FOB and CIF (Coetzee, 2010; Fu, 2015). From the perspective of empirical research and non-empirical research methods, domestic business English translation research mainly takes non-empirical research as the mainstream, while empirical research is less (Xu & Zi, 2014). Corpus linguistics, by relying on corpus technology and data statistical methods, has opened up a new path for linguistics and translation research and widened the research path (Xu & Zi, 2014). Based on the research method of corpus and combined with functional equivalence theory, this article makes an empirical study on international trade terms and their Chinese translation in order to provide reference for translation of international trade terms.

2. Research Methodology

2.1 Data Collection

In this article, a list of 750 international trade terms and their Chinese translations are mainly collected from Liang's monograph (2013), Feng's dictionary (2000) and the official website of the International Chamber of Commerce (ICC)[1].

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2.2 Construction of the Parallel Corpus

After deleting repeated terms and Chinese translations, then Tmxmall is used to align international trade terms and their Chinese translations for the construction of a parallel corpus.

2.3 Random Sampling of 120 Samples

It is not practical to analyze all the international trade terms with their Chinese translation. For the accuracy of this article, Excel is used to get 120 samples out of the list of 750 international trade terms.

2.4 Classification of the Sampled International Trade Terms

CLAWS5 is used to POS-tag the selected 120 international trade terms. No automatic tagger is 100 percent accurate (Biber, 2000), so it is essential to check and correct the errors. The following 2 types of tagging errors need to be amended.

2.4.1 Editing examples

(1) "bonded_VVD cargo_NN1" should be revised as "bonded_AJ0 cargo_NN1"

(2) "free_VVB on_PRP board_NN1" should be revised as "free_AJ0 on_PRP board_NN1".

Some English words in the international trade terms cannot be correctly identified by CLAWS5. For example, it is an unavoidable mistake that free can be a verb and an adjective which machine cannot fully recognized.

2.4.2 Types of international trade terms

As is shown in Table 1, the frequency of the 1-word terms is 20 and its percentage is 16.67%; the frequency of the 2-word terms is 38 with a high percentage is 31.67%; the frequency of the 3-word terms is 50 which accounts for the majority of the percentage 41.67%; the frequency of the 4-word terms is 8 with its percentage is 7.50%; the frequency of the 5-word terms is 2 with a low percentage is 1.67%; the frequency of the 6/7-word terms is 1 and its percentage is only 0.83%. Specifically speaking, in the 1-word terms, there's only one type "N", which appears 20 times and its percentage is 16.67%. In those 2-word terms, the one type is "PrM+N" which appears 24 times and its high percentage 20%; the other type is "V+O" which appears 14 times and its 11.67% percentage. Those 3-word terms include three types, the type "PrM+N" appears 27 times with a percentage up to 22.50%; the type "N+PoM" appears 18 times which accounts for a high percentage 15.00%; the type "V+O" appears 5 times and its percentage is 4.17%. In those 4-word terms, the type "PrM+N" and "N+PoM" share the same times which appear 3 times with a percentage 2.50%; the type "V+O" only appears 2 times with a low percentage 1.67%. And in those 5-word, 6-word and 7- word terms, "N+PoM" is the main type which appear 2, 1 and 1 times only. All in all, those 2-word and 3-word terms account for the majority of the international trade terms. As for the 2-word terms, the most frequently used types include "PrM+N" and "V+O"; and as for 3-word terms, "N+PoM", "PrM+N" and "V+O" appear frequently.

Table 1

Structures and Frequencies of 120 International Trade Terms

Term length	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Pos-tagging	Types	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1-word	20	16.67	NN1	N	20	16.67

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¹ The website of the International Chamber of Commerce(ICC) is https://iccwbo.org

2-word	38	31.67	NN1+NN1	N+PoM	10	8.30
			AJ0+NN1	PrM+N	14	11.67
			VVD+NN1	V+O	6	5
			VVG+NN1	V+O	8	6.67
3-word	50	41.67	NN1+NN1+NN1	N+PoM	13	10.83
			NN1+PRP+NN1	N+PoM	18	15
			AJ0+NN1+NN1	PrM+N	9	7.50
			AJ0+AJ0+NN1	PrM+N	5	4.17
			VVB+PRP+NN1	V+O	5	4.17
4-word	8	7.50	NN1+NN1+PRF+NN1	PrM+N	1	0.83
			NN1+VVN+PRP+NN1	N+PoM	1	0.83
			NN1+PRF+AJ0+NN1	N+PoM	1	0.83
			NN1+PRP+NN1+VVB	N+PoM	1	0.83
			AJ0+NN1+PRF+NN1	PrM+N	1	0.83
			AJ0+PRF+AJ0+NN1	PrM+N	1	0.83
			VVB+NN1+CJC+NN1	V+O	1	0.83
			VVN+PRP+NN1+VVD	V+O	1	0.83
5-word	2	1.67	NN1+PRF+NN1+VVG+NN2	N+PoM	1	0.83
			NN1+CJC+NN1+VVD+PRP	N+PoM	1	0.83
6-word	1	0.83	NN1+PRP+NN1+PRF+AJ0+NN2	N+PoM	1	0.83
7-word	1	0.83	NN1+TO0+VV1+NN2+PRP+AT0+NN1	N+PoM	1	0.83
Total	100	100		4	120	100

The abbreviation "N", "PoM", "PrM" ,"V" and "O" in this article stand for "noun", "post-modifier", "pre-modifier", "predicate" and "object". As is shown in Table 1, international trade terms can be classified into four kinds: "N", "N+PoM", "PrM+N" and "V+O" based on the POS-tagging results. All the types and frequencies of the international trade terms is briefly presented in Table 2. The most frequently used type is "PrM+N" with its highest frequency 54. The less frequently used types are "N", "N+PoM" and "V+O", with respectively frequencies of 20, 25 and 21. Systematically, those 120 international trade terms extracted from the corpus should be nominal groups. Such as "N", "N+PoM" and "PrM+N", are the typical examples of nominal groups. However, structures like "V+O" account for 17.50% of the extracted samples, which means that they should be translated into nominal phrases by means of nominalization in the Chinese translation of international trade terms.

Table 2

Frequencies of the 4 Kinds of International Trade Terms

Types	Frequency	Percentage (%)
N	20	16.67
N+PoM	48	40.00
PrM+N	31	25.83
V+O	21	17.50
4	120	100

3. Functional Equivalence and Chinese Translation of International Trade Terms

Equivalence does not equal identity. The translator should seek equivalent words in the target language instead of the same language (Weng, 2013). When translating international trade terms into Chinese, translators

should follow the principle of "functional equivalence" to conform to the linguistic characteristics of international trade terms.

3.1 Nida's Functional Equivalence

Functional equivalence is also called dynamic equivalence, which means that the meaning expressed or the information conveyed by the translation and the original text must be basically consistent. The distinguished American linguist and translation theorist Eugene A. Nida states that "Translating consists in reproducing in the receptor language the closest natural equivalent of the source-language message, first in terms of meaning and secondly in terms of style" (Nida, 2004). When translating terms, the premise is to convey the information contained in these terms through equivalents, which accords with the "meaning first, style second" in Nida's functional equivalence.

3.2 Chinese Translation of International Trade Terms

International trade terms have international universality, their meaning is precise, single, unambiguous, and do not have personal color, generally do not need to borrow the context to understand. In order to accurately describe the various aspects of international trade activities and the documents, agreements and contracts associated with them, clear technical terms must be used. Any translation of such a term into other translations would violate the terminology-equivalence of business English term translation. There are a number of words whose ordinary meanings are not used but whose professional meanings are in international trade terms. For example, the single term "future" should be translated as "期货" rather than"未来"; the word "corner" in 3-Word term "corner the market" should be translated as "垄断" rather than "角落". In order to keep the professional, formal and other linguistic features of the original text, translators should adopt different translation methods suitable based on functional equivalence. Literal translation should be used when the source language is equivalent to the target language, and free translation should be used when it is not equivalent to the target language.

3.3 Literal Translation

Literal translation refers to the translation of the literal meaning of a term into "natural appropriate" "equivalent" terms. Since literal translation can clearly and directly reflect the meaning of the original term, literal translation is generally preferred. For example, the type "N" of 1-word terms like "import" and "export" have their equivalent meaning "进口" "出口" in Chinese; the two type "PrM+N" and "V+O" of 2-word terms such as "bonded cargo" and "accepting bank" can be translated into "保税货物" and "承兑银行" due to the adoption of literal translation; the three type "PrM+N", "N+PoM" and "V+O" of 3-word terms like "cargo community system", "place of loading" and "delivered at frontier" can be translated as "货物社区系统", "装货处" and "边境交货" with the application of literal translation.

The English terms can be its own literal meaning to find equivalence in Chinese terms, in addition translated materials in most of the terms are used by English term literally means translation directly from the "closest natural" conforms to the Chinese express equivalent terms, which is derived from the literal translation method is convenient for translation, is good for foreign exchange.

3.4 Free Translation

Free translation refers to the translation of terms that are more consistent with the native language habits of target readers according to the extended meaning, working principle and conceptual equivalence of the terms in the source language. The aim is to avoid misinterpreting the original meaning or rendering the equivalent "natural". In other words, "free translation can be adopted when the literal translation is insufficient to express its professional meaning". The free translation methods used in the translation of international trade terms can be divided into two categories: amplification and simplification. For instance, the type "PrM+N" in 2-word terms like "general average" can be translated as "共同海损" due to the adoption of free translation, the meaning of the word "average" in "general average" cannot be literal translated as "平均值".

3.4.1 Amplification

The principle of amplification is not to add a meaning that is not contained in the original language. For instance, the type "N" in 1-word terms such as "handling" is translated as "装卸作业"; the type "PrM+N" in 2-word terms like "seamless process" and "sanitary certificate" are translated as "无缝处理流程" and "卫生检疫证书" with adding some necessary words "处理", "检疫" to faithfully express the content of the target language. The above terms are translated into equivalent terms by means of amplification, which completely conforms to the concept of the original term without confusing readers, and conforms to Nida's functional equivalence theory, which "makes the translation readers' understanding and appreciation of the target text as basic as the original readers' understanding and appreciation of the source text", paying attention to the equivalence of "content".

3.4.2 Omission

Omission means dropping a word or words from the source language text while translating. The procedure can be the outcome of the cultural clashes that exist between the source language and the target language. In Incoterms 2020[2], international commercial terms are directly translated as the 11 abbreviations such as "FOB (Free On Board)" and "CIF (Cost Insurance and Freight)" commonly used in the target language. Omission is adopted in some organizations like CIIE (China International Import Expo), MFN (Most Favoured Nation) and EPZ (Export Processing Zone). For instance, the type "PrM+N" of 3-word term such as "award of bid" is translated as "决标"; the type "N+PoM" of 5-word term like "assessment of duties and taxes" is translated as "估价"; the type "N+PoM" of 7-word term like "application to pass goods through the custom" is translated as "报关单".

To sum up, when translating terms, free translation is adopted when there are equivalent terms in Chinese that are more consistent than their literal meaning. According to the principle and conceptual content of terms, the above two free translation methods are more professional and accurate, easier for readers to accept and understand, and more in line with the "content" equivalence advocated by Nida's functional equivalence translation theory.

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[2] China Chamber of International Commerce. 2019. Incoterms 2020. University of International Business and Economics Press.

3.5 Combination of Literal and Free Translation

The combination of literal and free translation uses both literal translation and free translation in term translation. Most of those terms are multi-word terms, in which one word is determined according to free translation and literal translation is adopted in overall structure. For example, the type "N+PoM" of 3-word term like "import variable duties" and "dumping profit margin" are translated as "进口差价税" and "倾销差价". The word "variable" in this term can be translated as "差价" due to the adoption of free translation and the translation of the 3-word term "import variable duties" in a whole will not disturb the original meaning by means of literal translation. Similarly, the two words "profit" and "margin" share the same meaning, when translating, the 3-word term"dumping profit margin" faithfully follows the lexical equivalence and finds its equivalent form and content in Chinese.

Conclusion

This article extracts 120 international trade terms with their Chinese translations from the corpus, classifies the international trade terms into four types: "N", "N+ PoM", "PrM+ N" and "V+ O" based on terminology, and finally conclude three main translation methods under functional equivalence: literal translation, free translation and combination of literal and free translation. When translating international trade terms into the equivalent terms into Chinese, literal translation should be used when the source language is equivalent to the target language, and free translation should be used when it is not equivalent to the target language. Through formal equivalence and semantic equivalence, it can reach the maximum equivalence of the target language.

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