

On Zero Translation in News Discourse

GE Zhiwei

University of Shanghai for Science and Technology, Shanghai, China

In the context of globalization, zero translation words are more and more frequently used in news discourse. This article aims to explore the reasons for the frequent use of zero translation words in news discourse and their impact on news discourse from the perspectives of translation studies and journalism and communication studies.

Keywords: zero translation words, news discourse, communication studies

Introduction

In the information age, in order to more effectively disseminate and share information, people constantly change their way of using words, resulting in constantly changing characteristics of word usage. Zero translation words, such as WTO, VCD, MP3, etc., are more and more frequently used in news discourse. From the perspective of translation studies, foreign abbreviations in news discourse are actually zero translation. The birth of zero translation words is the result of “social choice”, and in the context of globalization, one of the trends in language is mutual compatibility. This article aims to explore the reasons for the frequent use of zero translation words in news discourse and their impact on news discourse from the perspectives of translation studies and journalism and communication studies.

The Forms of Zero Translation Words in News Discourse

Professor Qiu (2001) is the first to put forward the concept of zero translation. He proposes that zero translation is to translate the words in the source language without using the ready-made words in the target language. This includes two meanings:

- (a) deliberately not translating the meaning of words in the source language;
- (b) no ready-made words in the target language are used to translate the words in the source language.

The zero translation words in news discourse can be classified into the following three categories.

The Use of the Original Words

Such words are often English abbreviations. Abbreviation is the main word formation means in modern language, which directly or indirectly reduces the original longer and more complex words or phrases into shorter and simpler combinations without changing the meaning of words. English abbreviations are characterized by conciseness in word formation and ease of use, so they have strong vitality and special functional value. The

GE Zhiwei, M.A., lecturer, College of Foreign Languages, University of Shanghai for Science and Technology, Shanghai, China.

common abbreviations in news discourse involve politics, science and technology, sports, and other fields, which can be divided into five categories.

1. Abbreviations for organizations or institutions, such as Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) and International Organization for Standardization (ISO);
2. Abbreviations for positions or degrees, such as Chief Executive Officer (CEO) and Master of Business Administration (MBA);
3. Abbreviations for examinations, such as College English Test (CET) and Graduate Record Examination (GRE);
4. Abbreviations related to finance: Automated Teller Machine (ATM), Central Business District (CBD), and Gross Domestic Product (GDP);
5. Abbreviations for new technologies, information, and products: Global Position System (GPS), Information Technology (IT), and Emotional Quotient (EQ).

Transliterated Words

Transliteration is the process of transcribing the original word using the corresponding Chinese characters based on the pronunciation of the original text. This can also be divided into two categories. One is to faithfully transcribe Chinese characters according to the original pronunciation, such as “克隆” for clone in English and “欧佩克” for “Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries” (OPEC). The other type is not very faithful to the pronunciation of the original text, but often causes some differences in pronunciation between the transcribed Chinese characters and the original text when transcribing, such as the modem being transcribed as “猫” (cat), which is easier for Chinese speakers to pronounce, and helps to stimulate readers to generate associative meanings.

New Synonyms

“New synonyms” refer to foreign words that have acquired new meanings due to the development of technology and culture, but the corresponding Chinese does not have that meaning. This meaning is becoming more and more prominent, so people have to use these explicit meanings more frequently in Chinese. For example, the word “鼠标” in Chinese comes from the word “mouse” in English. If it were not for the development of computer technology, Chinese people would not have associated the meaning of the word “mouse” in English with the accessory to the computer.

New synonyms in news discourse can also derive similar words. The most representative one is the “门” (gate). The most common and prominent meaning of “门” in news discourse is “scandal”. And this meaning is purely derived from the addition of new meanings to the original English word. The addition of new meanings in English is also fueled by the news industry. The earliest “gate” incident can be traced back to the Watergate Scandal of the 1970s. As one of the most disgraceful political scandals in American history, the Watergate scandal had a long-term impact on the United States and the entire international news community. Since then, whenever US national leaders encounter governance crises or scandals, they are often referred to as “gates” by the international news community, such as “Iran Gate” and “Prisoner Abuse Gate”. In fact, Watergate is just the name of a building complex in Washington D.C. In the 1972 presidential election, the Republican Nixon

campaign was arrested on the spot when they installed eavesdropping devices and secretly filmed relevant documents in the Democratic National Committee office at the Watergate building in order to obtain intelligence on the Democratic Party's internal campaign strategy. Due to this matter, Nixon announced his resignation on August 8, 1974, becoming the first president in American history to resign. Afterwards, people extracted "gates" as a term for scandalous events (Huang & Xiao, 2010). As its equivalent in Chinese, "门" has also been given a new meaning of "events related to scandals" and has no longer been limited to government crises or scandals, but also related to some grassroots scandalous events. Any event that goes against common sense or morality can be labeled as "门", such as "Yanzhao Gate", "Milk Powder Gate", "Commentary Gate", and "Li Gang Gate".

The Function of Zero Translation Words in News Discourse

Making News Language More Concise and Vivid

As the saying goes, Brevity is the soul of wit. Conciseness and brevity are the basic requirements for news discourse. Zero translated words have the characteristics of conciseness and novelty, thus meeting the requirements of news discourse. English letters are easy to write and recognize, and abbreviations that appear in letter combinations can express complex meanings, making news language more concise and readable. The use of these concise words in Chinese news discourse can be confusing for those who do not understand English or are unfamiliar with the corresponding field. But with frequent use, these words have also become familiar to people. WTO and GDP have long become people's catchphrases in China.

More Conducive to the Dissemination of Discourse Information

The rapid development of science and technology requires people to accelerate the speed of information exchange. People's psychological expectations for the speed of information dissemination are also constantly increasing, hoping to obtain the necessary information more quickly and accurately. The zero translation words in news discourse provide a shortcut for people to quickly and accurately obtain the information they need. In technology news, there are often zero translation words that are concise and catchy for readers.

Spreading More Information to Readers

Words are imbedded with profound cultural information. Zero translation words are no exception. The Watergate incident not only had a long-term impact on the United States and the entire international news community, but also had a huge impact on the development of Chinese vocabulary.

Take the Watergate scandal for example. The English word "Watergate" was translated literally to "水门事件" in Chinese, which gave the word "gate" endless vitality and the ability to form countless new words. "Watergate" and new words with the suffix "gate" provide readers with a complex reading experience to obtain information. In this process, readers will inevitably receive more information related to the US election.

The Motivation for Zero Translated Words in News Discourse

In news discourse, zero translation words are constantly emerging. So, what kind of reasoning led to the emergence and frequent use of zero translated words in new discourse? There are two reasons for this:

The requirements of the development of the times. Our era is one of rapid technological development, rapid information expansion, and intense cultural collision, and the development of the times requires zero translation vocabulary. With the rapid development of science and technology, there are countless new products and technologies emerging. People need to use updated vocabulary to name new products and technologies with novel and unique English abbreviations. This not only allows for concise letter combinations to express complex technological connotations, but also makes it easy for the general public to understand and remember these vocabulary words. When reporters introduce the latest technological information to ordinary Chinese readers, it is neither necessary nor possible to translate English abbreviations into Chinese. Simply keeping the original words is the most convenient and reliable way. Some innovative zero translation terms have been introduced into Chinese and spread through journalists, such as Hacker, cool, gene, talk show, and so on.

The need of vocabulary innovation. Language must create neologisms in order to adapt to the rapid development of society. Both English and Chinese are constantly innovating vocabulary. The vast majority of English new words are translated into Chinese new words through zero translation, such as “硅谷” (silicon valley), “试管婴儿” (test-tube baby), “克隆羊” (clone sheep), “硬件” (hardware), “软件” (software), “数据库” (data bank), “因特网” (internet), and “博主” (blogger). These innovative words all appeared in news discourse first, and then became the subject of authoritative dictionaries with the help of news media.

The presentation of these innovative words in the form of zero translation words is not only a requirement for their lexical structure, but also a result of the differences between English and Chinese languages. English words can be distorted in the process of Chinese translation, which is caused by the uniqueness of Chinese word formation and the ubiquitous interference of the connotation of word formation components (Guo, 2005). English and Chinese belong to two completely different language families, so there are various differences in constructing new words. At the same time, the different cultural backgrounds between Chinese and English can also give different meanings to the Chinese translation of an English word, or even cause semantic gaps. It is naturally difficult to find ready-made equivalents in Chinese for a newly coined English word, and therefore, zero translation words may be the best strategy.

Conclusion

From the perspectives of translation studies and journalism and communication studies, the existence of zero translation words in Chinese news discourse is an undeniable fact and an unstoppable trend in language development. Its existence has significant value and meaning. Zero translation vocabulary not only frequently appears in news discourse, but we also encounter a large number of zero translation words in learning, work, and communication. These words cover all aspects of our lives, and their prevalence conforms to the “economic principles” in our lives, work, and interactions.

We should adopt a tolerant attitude towards the use of zero translation words, and treat them with caution based on their meaning, scope of use, and target audience. For news discourse targeting specialized audiences such as technology and economics, it is advisable to use more zero translation words to facilitate the rapid and effective dissemination of information.

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