

A Translation Analysis of American News Coverage Towards China in 2020 American Presidential Election Based on the Manipulation Theory

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The ideological and cultural impact is prominent in Chinese news translation, since most of the news translators are sponsored by the authority. By analyzing the Chinese to English news translation based on the manipulation theory proposed by André Lefevere, the present study aims at illustrating the textual manipulation in translation, so as to conclude the general principles for the practice of Chinese news translators. The manipulation theory denotes a translation theory that attaches importance to the ideology and socio-cultural background of target text audience. It includes three aspects—ideology, patronage, and poetics—and can be adapted into the analysis of news translation, which is particularly influenced by the first two aspects. Thus, the manipulation theory can be viewed as an appropriate tool for analyzing news translation that is bounded by certain interest groups, and may further shed light on some proper methods for news translation in a certain social background. Based on the close analysis of three news article during 2020 American presidential election and their Chinese translation, the study found that the translators would use translation techniques such as omission and alteration to “rewrite” the original text, thus conforming to the ultimate purposes of political news circulation in China—conveying positive image and showcase national identity.

Keywords: manipulation theory, news translation, rewriting, ideology, power relation

Nowadays, globalization has become an irreversible trend, as people all around the world are integrated more than ever. People are increasingly curious for nations and cultures that are different from their own, thus searching for latest international news by every means. This is especially true for the people of China and the US, two of the most influential nations in the world, whose relation undergoes unpredictable changes in recent years. Last year witnesses the 2020 American presidential election, which generates loads of political media coverage targeting at China and China-US relationship. However, there are huge difference between the contextual and socio-cultural background of the two countries, influencing the strategies and principles adopted in the translation of related news.

The manipulation school, representing by Belgian scholar André Levefere, lays much emphasis on “translation as rewriting” and “translation as manipulation”, which argues that translation is bound to be greatly influenced by cultural and political factors. Therefore, this theory can be used in analyzing news translation, as its subsystems—ideology, patronage, and poetics—deal with different perspectives concerning news translation.

Based on this, the current paper chooses the English news coverage of China that has been translated into Chinese during 2020 American presidential election as the corpora, and examines the translation from the above three perspectives, aiming at providing translator with methods to make appropriate adjustments to meet the requirements of Chinese national conditions. Also, the proper use of manipulation in news translation may help the target text readers to remove cultural and psychological barriers while reading, as news media are a complex, power-dominated, and sensitive field.

Literature Review

The current literature concerning the manipulation of news translation mostly places much emphasis on the reasons for its appearance. Generally, four factors are examined. In “A Study of News Translation From the Perspective of the Manipulation Theory”, Zhang and Lyu (2019) asserted that “the translator should cater for foreign reader’s reading habits” (p. 532), which poses to the linguistic difference between Chinese and English. Zhang and Lyu (2019) further added that common approaches to adjust linguistic differences are changing the order of clause or phrase, adding or deleting information when necessary, etc. The rationale behind this factor is that born with different language traditions, the Chinese and English readers are accustomed to different forms of linguistic norms that become the first essential concern in news translation.

The second factor deals with cultural distinctions, which actually casts light on a special term “cultural turn” that is used in translation studies for the move towards the analysis of translation from a cultural and political angle. Wang and Gu (2017) argued in “On News Translation and Manipulation of Ideology” that “The focus is target-oriented, and its relation with the target culture instead of its relationship with the source text deepens the development in ‘cultural turn’ in the process of translation” (p. 60). This emphasizes that when translating news coverage, not only the inner-system influential factors (linguistic structures) should be considered, but also that of outer-system as well (cultural norms).

Reminded by André Levefere (1992), scholars have also concentrated on the ideological ramifications on news translation. After conducting their discourse analysis on news translation between Persian and English in Iran, Keshavarz and Zonoozi (2011) maintained in “Manipulation of Ideology in Translation of Political Texts: A Critical Discourse Analysis Perspective” that “ideology is transmitted and sometimes imposed in subtle ways” (p. 1). They finally concluded that the ideology behind a translated text is revealed both in grammatical and lexical patterns. Similarly, Liang (2019) also adopted the method of discourse analysis to extend the discussion of news translation. In his book *A Discourse Analysis of News Translation in China*, he observed that “Regulated by translation policies, institutional routines, and cultural influences, translators’ practice is manipulated by ideology” (p. 151). Apart from the ideology viewed from a macro perspective, the personal ideology of the translators—the one viewed from a micro perspective—can also exert influence on the final product, as Liang (2019) stated that “the translators’ competence, stance, ideology, and social and cultural perspectives might unfold in the text rendition” (p. 161).

The last factor deals with the power relations behind interlingual translation. Such factor is closely related to Levefere’s “patronage” system in translation manipulation, for it can either be persons, or groups of persons (i.e., a religious party, a political party, etc.). Thus, Levefere (1992) believed that patrons “regulate the relationship between literary system and the other systems” (p. 15). Based on this, Song (2017)’s research “Impact of Power and Ideology on News Translation in Korea: A Quantitative Analysis of Foreign News Gatekeeping” which is published on the renowned journal *Perspectives*, conducted a translation study about the

translation of governmental news finished by Yonhap, a news agency financially supported by South Korean Government, and drew to the conclusion that “any power relations and structures could potentially dictate translation decisions throughout the entire course of news production” (p. 12). Liang and Wei (2020) have similar opinions towards the effects of power relations on news translation as Song. They stated in their article “Institutionalization in News Translation: The Use and Abuse of Manipulation” that “various power relations hugely affect how participants see and act on their work” (p. 77). However, they have also extended their analysis to examining another aspect of power relation: oppression or empowerment that a weaker culture undergoes when encountering a stronger culture.

The above literature generally covers the influential factors that appear in the manipulation of news translation, which offers reasonable and reliable angles and ways of analyzing data for the current research. However, the paramount importance of news coverage is time-effectiveness, which points to the fact that the materials in the literature above are relatively out-of-date. Hence, the current study aims at choosing the latest materials—news coverage appears in 2020 American presidential election—and undertakes research particularly on English-Chinese translation.

Methods

Roberts (2020) stated in *Text Analysis for the Social Sciences: Methods for Drawing Statistical Inferences from Texts and Transcripts* the following:

Qualitative analyses are usually performed not on randomly sampled data but on strategically selected case studies. Whereas the probabilistic inferences of quantitative analyses yield conclusions about the generalizability of one’s findings, the logical inferences of qualitative analyses yield conclusions about the universality of one’s theories. (p. 3)

Based on Robert’s quotation, this study will choose qualitative analyses as its methodology, for it is a case study which aims at demonstrating examples of manipulation in news translating and seek inspirations for future translation from these examples.

The corpora for current study are three pieces of up-to-date news coverage, covering China-US relations in political, technological, and medical aspects during 2020 presidential election of the US. The source texts are extracted from renowned news website such as Foreign Affairs, Brookings Institution, and CNN edition. The target text are published in the form of translation text on either *Guancha Syndicate* website or *Global Times* website—both are websites certificated by the officials, and are popular among Chinese audience. The specific methods for the analysis of data will be based on Levefere’s theory, conducting descriptive translation studies (i.e., a branch of translation studies that aims at identifying norms and laws of translation (Munday, 2016, p. 170)) from the parameters of patronage, ideology, and poetics.

Discussion

Any kind of translation is affected by the factors of patronage, ideology, and poetics. Particularly, news translation is more profoundly affected by the first two factors, as news is often patronized by certain interest groups with their own ideology. These patrons want their ideology to be reflected in the final production of translation to demonstrate their beliefs to target text readers. Yet in other cases, news translation can be affected by the translator’s personal ideology, including personality, educational background, life experience, and moral values. While the influence of poetics in news translation may not be as prominent as that in literary works, it

emphasizes the motifs, themes, literary devices. In light of this, this section will examine the corpora from the three terms coined by Levefere respectively, in which the core concept of each terms will be provided first, followed by the data analysis.

The Influence of Ideology on New Translation

Ideology consists of the norms, conventions, and beliefs that regulate people's behaviors. It is a conceptual network formed by opinions and viewpoints that are approved by certain society or interest groups. Therefore, for Lefevre, "the most important consideration (in translation) is the ideological one" (Munday, 2016, p. 203). For example, in Lefevre's *Translation, Rewriting and the Manipulation of Literary Fame*, Anne Frank's diary and its translated version in 1950 are closely analyzed. He found that "many derogatory remarks about Germans are omitted or toned down" (Munday, 2016, p. 204), as the translator Anneliese Schütz did not want to risk insulting all Germans in the postwar era. Such rewriting, viewed from Lefevre's perspective, is due to ideological pressures. Therefore, while maintaining the fundamental facts in source text, translators should also shift their viewpoints so that the translating work can circulate within a certain social context.

Ideology exerted by certain interest groups. In present Chinese mainstream media, the similar ideological influence can be found in the news translation, as translators also implement skills such as omission and alteration. A case in point is as follows:

Example 1: China's "wolf warriors," the diplomats who aggressively defend Beijing and fiercely counter criticism about the country, would probably prefer Trump... (*CNN News*, 2020)

The paralleled translation was published on *Guancha Syndicate* website on November 23, 2020, in which the phrase "aggressively defend" is translated as "积极捍卫" (actively defend). This is because that when viewed from Chinese people's angle, the fierce arguments and even harsh words in diplomatic occasions are the symbol of their strong will to safeguard the nation's reputation and rights. Thus, the word "aggressively" in this case was altered in order to meet the ideology of Chinese government and people.

Ideology exerted by translators' personal values. As is stated above, since ideology can be either exerted by certain interest groups or the translator him/herself, there are also circumstances when the translation reflects the personal values of translators. An example is given below:

Example 2: What unintended consequences all the positive and negative aspects of this energized techno-nationalism in the United States will have is another question. (*Foreign Policy*, 2020)

The translator of *Global Times* rendered the phrase "energized techno-nationalism" as "打鸡血般的科技民族主义", which denotes a negative meaning of an excessively passionate attitudes towards techno-nationalism. Yet the original words "energized" is more of a neutral adjective that even indicates a slight positive sense. It is translator's personal attitudes toward the American techno-nationalism that leads to such manipulation in the final translated text.

The Influence of Patronage on New Translation

According to Levefere, patronage can be exerted by persons, or by groups of persons such as a religious body, a political party, a social class, and publishers. He emphasized that "Patrons try to regulate the relationship between the literary system and the other systems, which, together, make up a society, a culture" (Levefere, 1992, p. 15). If the parameter of patronage is considered within the context of information age, the spread of information can bring huge benefits to the patrons. When patron is a business behemoth, the circulation of news that is in line with its interest will boost its revenue, while news that caters to the taste and

need of news media consumer—the patrons of news agencies—may deliver more handsome profits to new agencies themselves.

The influence of patronage on translation. Virtually, the impact of ideology and patronage on translation is intertwined and mutually dependent, partly because the ideology of the patrons in some cases is the key dominator in the translation practice. Based on their ideology, patrons will restrict the textual form and choice of content for translators, and the latter have to comply with the needs of the formers who are the source of their commission and the decision maker of their position. For example, *Global Times* is an international newspaper patronized by CPC Central Committee, and a subordinate to the official newspaper of CPC—*People's Daily*. Such special nature indicates that its opinions and views should conform to the ideology of CPC and central government, aiming to establish its positive image worldwide. There is even a particular style guide for the news translators of *Global Times* website to better perform their duty such as conveying the appropriate and positive information to the readers. Thus, patrons have an incomparable influence on translators and their translation.

A case in point is a series of editorials on the website of Brookings Institution in which an article entitled “Avoiding Three Traps in Confronting China’s Party-State” (Brookings, 2020). This title is translated as “拜登应避免与中国对抗的三个陷阱” when published on *Global Times* (2020b) website, with the phrase “party-state” (党国) being deleted. As a political “mouthpiece” and the window for cultural exchange, the interest of *Global Times* is in line with that of Chinese government, whose political stands are different from other countries under certain circumstances. Although the CPC is the absolute power center in Chinese politics, it is crucial to note that when translating political news, translator should comply with the political principle of the nation and the government—people’s democratic dictatorship. Thus, translator must give priority to it during translation process.

Undifferentiated and differentiated patronage. In his book, Levefere (1992) categorized patronage into two types: undifferentiated and differentiated patronage. The former denotes the patronage whose “three components, the ideological, the economic, and the status components, are all dispensed by one and the same patron” (p. 17), while the economic success of the latter “is relatively independent of ideological factors, and does not necessarily bring status with it, at least not in the eyes of the self-styled literary elite” (p. 17). Therefore, in terms of the patronage of political news coverage such as *Global Times* and *People's Daily*, it is the CPC which is undifferentiated and gives them subventions. In light of this, the patron’s efforts will primarily be directed at preserving the stability of the social system as a whole, focusing on maintaining national identity. An example is as follows:

Example 3: ...Beijing is poised to dominate the distribution of vaccines to the developing world—and to reap the strategic benefits of doing so. (*Foreign Affairs*, 2020)

The translator of *Global Times* omitted the entire underlined sentence above in the translated version that published on the *Global Times* website on November 7. It is true that the purpose of China providing coronavirus vaccine to the developing countries is to establishing a positive image worldwide, as well as cementing alliance with these countries when it comes to diplomatic realm. But the news coverage on such strategic decisions should convey the proper message to Chinese people—China is a responsible great power aims at helping the disadvantaged. Thus, the underlying goal of vaccine distribution is deleted when translating.

The Influence of Poetics on New Translation

According to Lefevere, “there are two general constraints that translators have to deal with when translating—the translator’s own (conscious or unconscious) ideology and ‘the poetics’ dominant in the target culture” (Kramina, 2004, p. 37). The poetics is the combination of literary devices, genres, motifs, prototypical characters and situations, and symbols (Lefevere, 1992, p. 26) and “the concept of what the role of literature is, or should be, in the social system as a whole” (Lefevere, 1992, p. 26). In the literary system, factors as motifs and prototypical characters may become formalized as in the case of European fairytales of princesses, princes and evil stepmothers.

While in the sphere of news translation, poetics is embodied in the genre and style, which include factors such as overall tone, handling of rhetorical devices, and the order of clause or phrase. For instance, many mainstream news media over the world have their own style guide for translation, such as *AP Stylebook and Briefing on Media Law With Internet Guide and Glossary*, *Reuters Handbook of Journalism*, and *The Global Times Stylebook*. Particularly, news coverage emphasizes briefness, and should grab readers’ attention upon the first sight. This can be exemplified by “The US-China Rivalry in Tech and Trade Won’t End Because Joe Biden Is President”—the title of CNN Business on November 9, 2020—which is translated as “拜登当选，继续较量” by the translator of Guancha Syndicate. Such translation consists of two four-character words, which is concise and eye-catching enough as the title of a piece of news.

The handling of literary devices is another important factor that requires discretion. One may seek help and inspiration from what Cooper (1978) mentioned:

If the language of the original employs word formations that give rise to insurmountable difficulties of direct translation ... it is better to cling to the spirit of the poem and clothe it in language and figures entirely free from awkwardness of speech and obscurity of picture. (p. 484)

A case in point is as follows:

Example 4: When China distributes vaccines worldwide next year, some scenes from this movie may rerun. (*Foreign Affairs*, 2020)

The sentence above is rendered as “明年中国在全球分发疫苗时，类似场景可能再现” (when China distributes vaccines worldwide next year, similar scenes may recur). The “scene” here refers to the moment when Italian Foreign Minister Luigi di Maio credited the assistance from China that prevented them from lurching towards worse situation during coronavirus pandemic. The translator omitted “this movie” when translating, partly because this word is clothed with a slight trace of irony that should not appear in the official news coverage, but in larger part because the direct translation of “movie” (电影) here may cause confusion and awkward speech. Thus, in this case, the actual meaning outweighs the form of expression.

Conclusion

This study was undertaken to evaluate the rewriting and the manipulation of the original text in news translation resulted from different ideology and culture. It analyzed several pieces of news coverage during 2020 American presidential election and their paralleled Chinese translation based on the three parameters proposed by André Levefere, namely ideology, patronage, and poetics. The investigation showed that types of manipulation such as addition, deletion, and alteration of certain contents are very common in political news translation, aiming at projecting the image of an authority who actually determines the ideology.

The data analysis indicates that political news translators in China, either influenced by their patron's ideology, or their own ideology, tend to rewrite contents that are against social conventions and national identity, which should be upheld in the international political arena. Moreover, based on the analysis, this study concludes that Chinese news translator should adhere to some of the most important principles in the course of translation.

However, this study also bears some limitations. The small sample size did not allow a more thorough and profound investigation of more types of news translation. Also, more evidence should be added to further strengthen the rationality of translation principles that concluded above. Future work may enlarge the volume of data, and propose a comprehensible guideline for political news translation in China.

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