

# Translation of News Headlines Under Contextual Theory

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With the coming of all kinds of information, the world is becoming one indivisible planet. People not only pay attention to major events in their own countries, but also gradually pay attention to international news and learn about the world situation. As one of the world's common languages, English news accounts for a large proportion of the news market. Usually when people choose to read current events, they will look at the headlines first, and then at the content of the article. Therefore, whether the translated news headlines can accurately convey information and catch readers' attention in a short time plays a very important role in the dissemination of news. Based on the context theory, this paper studies and analyzes the translation of some news headlines, expecting to provide some suggestions for news translation.

*Keywords:* translation, news headlines, context theory

## Introduction

Nowadays, people can get what they are interested in from the Internet without having to travel all over the world. Just as a world-renowned book needs a good translator to help spread it, a worthy piece of news needs a high-quality translation to spread it in a short time. Today, when time is so precious, if certain news wants to stand out and becomes the focus of the public, the first thing to do is to have pretty attractive headlines. Therefore, for the news translator, the translation must make the title vivid and interesting while ensuring the accuracy of the content. As a title, first of all, its form is relatively short, sometimes only two or three words, or some slang and allusions. In this case, the difficulty of the translator's work has been greatly increased. Translators should fully consider the style and type of news and choose corresponding translation methods. The title of a news report often coincides with its coverage, and the title is restricted by the content. Thus, context plays an important role in the translation of English news headlines. English translation theorist Newmark once put forward that context is a factor that cannot be ignored in the process of translation. It is more important than the theory of language rules and the meaning of language itself, and the context of translation is like the relationship between fish and water. News titles are like book titles, so more attention should be paid to translation. On the one hand, they should be vivid and interesting, which can attract readers to continue reading, and on the other hand, they should be concise and to the point, so that readers can infer the main trend of the news from the title. Under the guidance of context theory, this paper discusses and analyzes the translation methods of English news headlines.

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## Context Theory

### The Emergence of Context Theory

Context, the abbreviation of linguistic environment or speech environment, is a basic and core concept in pragmatics, semantics, stylistics, rhetoric, and sociolinguistics. In the West, the concept of “context” was put forward by the German linguist Wegener in 1885. In his view, context can determine the meaning of language. It was not until 1923 that the “context” theory was formally put forward by a Polish anthropologist Malinowski. In his observations of South Pacific islanders, he found that the indigenous languages were only communicated within their own ethnic groups, because the meaning of language would involve knowledge of the local cultural background. In short, language conveys information that requires tacit understanding on both sides of the conversation. If listeners want to accurately receive the content and information that speakers want to express, the conversation must be based on shared culture. In this way, information entropy can be reduced to ensure more accurate understanding and more timely and convenient communication. In his book *The Problem of Meaning in Primitive Language*, Malinowski proposed and explained the “situational context”, and further explained that the understanding of language is fundamentally inseparable from the linguistic environment.

### Development of Context Theory

Inspired by Malinowski’s view, many language scholars began to rethink and try to re-examine the connotation of context from different angles. Firth, a British linguist, took this view as a starting point and put forward a unique theory of meaning from the perspective of linguistics, which makes the concept of context widely used in semantics. Later, Halliday, another British linguist, from the perspective of sociology, integrated predecessors’ thoughts with his own thinking, and finally closely integrated the study of meaning with language form, language function, and language environment. With the continuous research of scholars and the continuous development of theories, two theoretical systems of “static context” and “dynamic context” are finally formed.

### Context Theory and Translation

In today’s linguistics, a popular view of language divides context into three categories: linguistic context, situational context, and cultural context. Linguistic context refers to the cultural basis on which the language depends. Therefore, countries with unique culture may adopt different linguistic forms and structures to express the same content. In English sentences, there is usually an object as the subject of the sentence, so it is called the inanimate subject sentence. However, Chinese sentences pay more attention to self-expression, generally taking human as the subject and attaching importance to the exerting effect of human subject. This is also the difference between Chinese and English languages. Therefore, when translating news headlines, we should fully master different language environments and backgrounds, take care of the feelings of the target language readers under the condition that the content is fully conveyed, and flexibly change various structures. Situational context is abstracted from the actual situation and some conditions that affect speech activities, including both participants, occasion, topic, and environment. When translating news headlines, translators are obliged to understand the multi-level meanings of each word and grasp the overall style and main ideas of the news, so as to accurately find out the adopted meanings of each word and select Chinese words that meet the standard. It is worth noting that the headlines of English news generally use short words with rich connotations and a formal and eye-catching style. Therefore, we cannot simply translate the meaning of words and then combine them together. Even if the translation is completed, we must pay attention to accuracy and objectivity.

Cultural context can be divided into cultural customs and social norms, which covers a wide range of historical allusions and local customs of the language. There are many kinds of news, which may involve various aspects of people's life, such as the culture, history, geography, or religious activities of a country. Different cultural backgrounds may also be misleading when we understand the meaning of the title. From these aspects, context will affect the translation of news headlines to a great extent.

### **Translation Strategies of News Headlines**

#### **Additional Translation**

Example 1:

Dog theft: Calls made for tougher sentencing

Translation: 群众呼吁加大宠物盗窃惩罚力度

Analysis: The story focuses on a man whose only company is his dog since his wife died seven years ago. But this year he was nearly heart-broken when a thief stole the dog. As a result, people argue that existing laws fail to reflect the emotional bond between pets and their owners, and therefore such theft should be considered kidnapping and subject to the full force of the law. The title only named the cause of the incident as a dog theft case, but behind the reflection is the protection of all pets. Therefore, translating pet theft as more than just dog theft broadens the scope and more comprehensively summarizes the main purpose of the news.

Example 2:

Juneteenth Holiday

Translation: 美国多出来的公休日: 6月19日

Analysis: U.S. President Joe Biden has signed a bill establishing June 19 as a public holiday to commemorate the end of slavery in the United States. It's been called one of his greatest triumphs since taking office. The title only writes a simple date, but we know from reading the news that this is not an ordinary day, but a holiday. Therefore, it is necessary to add supplementary information to explain the specific meaning of this day in translation, so that readers can see at a glance.

Example 3:

To feed the world

Translation: 让全世界的人吃上水稻

Analysis: This news is written in memory of Grandpa Yuan Longping; the content mainly revolves around grandpa Yuan's great achievements, his growing experience, and the great desire to keep the world from hunger. As is known to all, Grandpa Yuan Longping is the father of hybrid rice. His whole life is devoted to cultivating new varieties of hybrid rice, so that people all over the world can eat his rice and will not die of hunger any more. Although the literal meaning of the title is to feed the world, but we know the food is that taking the rice to feed, so it increases the rice word and can make the reader immediately associate with Yuan Longping, which can also make us feel his great power and selfless; further concern is not just the men of his own country, but the suffering people of the world.

#### **Free Translation**

Example 1:

Defending ourselves from meteorites

Translation: 保护地球免受太空陨石的侵害

Analysis: An astronaut found a rock on the ice in Antarctica, and he wanted to determine if it was a meteorite. Because studying the formation of meteorites helps us understand how earth itself formed, we can take steps to protect our planet when meteorites do fall. To the meteorites, we are also a planet, namely, the Earth. The translator directly changes it into earth, our home on which we live, which is not only interesting but also clear enough.

Example 2:

Why the UK's May weather has been a washout?

Translation: 为何英国五月的天气千变万化?

Analysis: A lot of people have been complaining about the weather recently, because the weather in May was still very cold, wet, windy, and wet. However, the weather is likely to be sunny again the next day, so people's mood becomes very upset due to the unpredictable weather. Washout originally meant "scour, failure" to allude to the fact that it had been raining, but the translation skillfully interpreted it as "ever-changing". Not only to describe the weather is uncertain, but also reflect people's mood that no one likes the changeable weather.

Example 3:

Can flying go green?

Translation: 环保飞行的可能性

Analysis: A company committed to sustainable aviation is testing a plane that could solve aviation's biggest challenges. This is the world's sole hydrogen-powered aircraft. It's all about the construction of this plane and its advantages and uniqueness that are different from other planes. But at the same time, the cost of building such a plane is very high. So whether the future of zero carbon flight can be realized is still in prospect. The original title was a question: Can flying be green? It is easy for readers to feel confused. Through reading, we learn that green here means environmental protection and energy saving. Therefore, the translation has been adjusted and the possibility of environmentally friendly flying has become not only a statement, but also more specific, and the content of the news has also been sublimated a lot.

## Conclusion

With the outbreak of COVID-19, the fate of the entire world has been closely united. People are also starting to pay more attention to international news coverage rather than national news. Therefore, bilingual news is bound to be the general trend, which is also a big challenge for translators. The rapid development of global informatization not only brings us many opportunities, but also throws up greater challenges. In this age of communication, the speed of information exchange is beyond our imagination, and China is beginning to occupy an important position and have a voice on the international stage. News, by definition, is something new, so it will always change with the times. As the beginning of the article, the news title is the first part that readers notice, so the accuracy of translation cannot be underestimated, which can affect the speed of news content transmission to a certain extent. Because the quality of title translation directly affects people's first impression, it determines whether people continue to read the news or skip to the next news. Due to the differences between Chinese and English, some adjustments should be made in the translation of English headlines, which also shows that the importance of the translation of English news headlines cannot be ignored. As language workers, we need to grasp the precision of language and do the best we can within our power. From the perspective of context theory, this paper analyzes and studies specific cases through the two

translation methods of addition and modification, and explores the tips of news title translation, hoping to provide some ideas and insights for such translation in the future.

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