

Review Article

Risks and Strategies of News Translation: A Case Study of Qingting English APP

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Abstract: English learning platforms in China are increasingly popular among students. More features are developed and a wide range of contents are included to serve the diverse need of English learners. Despite the increasing amount and diversity of contents, its quality varies. This research discusses some problems and strategies of news translation from English to Chinese. Samples are all taken from one English learning platform, Qingting English APP, with source text from news media such as VOA, CNN and BBC, and target text provided by the platform. These major problems emerged during our study: 1) Some contents involving ideological differences are not treated properly in translation; 2) Many complex informative sentences are poorly translated; 3) Source news are sometimes incorrectly transcribed, leading to mistaken translation. By analyzing some possible risks of the existing problems, this study, in light of the risk management framework, provided some applicable strategies to achieve better translation for learners using Qingting APP. Firstly, it is advisable to avoid the potential risks by omitting/ rewriting some extremely controversial content, or to transfer the risk to other sources than the platform by marking/labeling the strongly biased report. Secondly, domestication strategy is preferable in translating English complex sentences into Chinese since it minimizes the communication risk between translators and target learners. Thirdly, a responsible translator is advised to fix errors of the source audio/text to exactly comprehend the original news so as to reduce the uncertainty risk.

Keywords: News Translation, Qingting English APP, Ideologically Controversial Content, Communication Risk, Risk Management

1. Introduction

English news, for English learners in China, serves these major purposes: to improve their command of English, to increase their overall knowledge of a foreign culture and to keep them updated on current international events. For the purpose of learning, the news material presented on online English learning platforms is usually cherry-picked, edited and then translated. From the dozens and even hundreds of pieces of news a channel produces each day, only a few of them will be brought to the platform. For a platform to meet users' expectation, both the selection and translation of learning material should be treated with discretion. Inappropriate translation leads to confusion, misunderstanding and even supply learners with false

knowledge. Despite users' capability of identifying errors and judging the contents themselves, the learning platforms, with the role to help its customers (the learners) understand the selected materials, are definitely responsible for the quality of their contents. In this study, we will examine some examples of news translation on Qingting English APP, analyze some existing problems, then provide a few suggestions concerning how to manage the potential risks and achieve high-quality news translation.

2. News Translation on Learning Platforms as a Risky Activity

In the last two decades, news translation has been attracting growing attention in translation studies. However,

there is not yet any established theoretical framework applicable to analyze the activity of news translation and the decision-making process in it [1]. In spite of some cases studies on general news translation, news translation on the learning platforms is almost ignored by the relevant researchers. News translation is usually performed by journalist-translators with limited or no specific translator training, but the task to translate news for platforms is mostly completed by employees with good command of English and translation knowledge, though levels of which vary. News translation does not occur when news organizations simply report on events that happened in a foreign language setting, but it is necessary in every piece of news selected to facilitate English learning. Another uniqueness of new translation lies in the form—instead of simple “text-to-text, speech-to-text or text-to-oral reproduction”, the users are provided with the speech, transcript and translation simultaneously, so that they can listen while reading the transcript and translation. To a large degree, transcript and translation in the learning platforms fulfill the function similar to the caption in movies.

2.1. Characteristics of News Language

Generally, news language has the following three characteristics of being informative, immediate and inter-cultural.

Firstly, news language is highly informative. The major function of news is to provide the public with information, sometimes not just about a particular event that happened, but also the background of this event, of the people involved, and other similar or related events to help readers better comprehend a situation that is going on.

Secondly, news is characterized by its immediacy. Learners use online English learning platforms to keep them updated on what is happening around the world, and to meet the need, platforms will extract up-to-date news from the reliable media and provide corresponding translation for learners. Since these platforms are seen as a source of not only news, but also the translated version of news, translators are not given too much time to work on the material.

Thirdly, news translation is an inter-cultural activity. Similar to any other field of translation, news translation deals with not only the language, but the cultural factors as well. Cultural or ideological factors have an important effect on media reports, despite their attempts to maintain objectivity. Media also represent the interests of particular groups or they are directly funded by some interest groups. Consciously or unconsciously, what the media write and announce imply their distinct understanding and stance of what happens, which complicates the process of news translation.

2.2. Risks in News Translation

Due to its multidisciplinary nature, translation is always considered as a highly complex and risky activity. Considering the characteristics of news language and lack of time given to the translators, news translation proves even

more challenging. The standards of “good” or “appropriate” translation are never written as established laws. In most circumstances, translators are required to be faithful to the meaning and style of the source text, and produce readable and fluent translation from the perspective of target language. In recent years, the concept of risk management as a new approach advocated by Anthony Pym [2] in professional translation, has been applied to different fields of translation studies, including news translation. To be specific, the risk in translation is mainly related to the uncertainty of the event like the translator’s doubts about his/her right/wrong understanding of the text, or his/her doubts related to the accurate choice of equivalent expressions in the target language [3].

Taking news translation as a task with a number of risks ranging from uncertainty to communicative ones, risk management focuses on the way the translator deals with these different risks. Facing a piece of news, the translator should first identify the risks of loss or potential misunderstanding of the source text, and then make a choice of the appropriate strategy to manage the risks. In many cases, the translator feels uncertain about the translation of some expressions, which gives rise to the uncertainty risk. Plus, there is also a risk of communication while dealing with some culturally loaded materials and concepts because it’s extremely difficult for translators to achieve efficient communication with the target readers. Luckily, some strategies such as avoidance, mitigation and transfer have been proved to be useful in actual translation practice. Avoidance means to evade translating the word/passage that might be ambiguous or risky into the target language, and mitigation is to make the translated version less dangerous and intense when some culturally-sensitive concept, for example, needs to be translated. Differently, transfer is a strategy to move the potential risk to another less relevant field by putting aside the uncertainty, disagreement or embarrassment that arises in translation. This being said, there is no perfect strategy for a given situation when translating English news to Chinese. It all depends on the translator’s awareness, knowledge, vision and skill of dealing with specific risks. “News translation must comply with basic translation principles but also be flexible in some specific cases” [4]. As Pym [2] summarized, “success of a translation nowadays can be measured by the user pushing the right button or clicking on the right link, rather than by comparison with any anterior text”.

In the following discussion, we’ll focus on dealing with ideologically disputable news, translating complex informative sentences, and fixing the errors of source transcripts.

3. Translation of the Ideologically Disputable News

In news translation, the particular factor of ideology should be noted. Ideology is often associated with

disagreement in political stances, social policies, etc. Commenting on a political event, the superiority or justice of political systems is a common practice of media. Although accuracy and objectivity have been the goals of media, they are unlikely to be totally objective. There are circumstances when some news outlets intentionally bias people against or in favor of an idea because they are tied to some interest groups; a journalist may also produce slanted articles unintentionally.

Ideologically disputable news is high risk in the context of learning a foreign language. News material on online English learning platforms is distinguished from that of news agencies in that it is chosen selectively merely for the purpose of learning. The information we see on the Internet is fragments, but the material on these platforms are even more fragmented. More often than not, language learners cannot see the full picture of a story. One-sided narrative can be misleading and confusing to immature students or people unfamiliar with such events, which makes it significant for translators to spot content that are ideologically controversial and process it appropriately. When translators are not equipped with the knowledge of conflicted views with respect to ideology, the translated result is likely to be as biased as the source text is.

Then there is the risk of stirring repulsion. A text with a certain ideology, when brought to a group of people with a diametrically opposed ideology, may produce adverse effects. Unsatisfied users may unsubscribe, ask for refund or take further steps to report what they deem false or inappropriate. The risk of censorship is not to be ignored as well. Contents considered false or inappropriate could be taken down from the platform, however controversial this approach might be. Both these two risks can bring loss or more workload to the platform, so they must be managed.

3.1. Omit the Disputable Content to Avoid Risk

In translation study, both “domesticating” and “foreignising” strategies have been proposed as important approaches. The domesticating strategy uses only terms the reader will immediately recognize and understand whereas the foreignizing approach, by contrast, involves retaining something of the foreignness of the source text, be that foreign culture, concepts or syntax [5]. It is a norm that domesticating is more frequently employed and it is consistent with the newswriting principle that readers should be able to quickly understand the reporting, without bothering to look beyond the information provided [6]. Differently, foreignizing is commonly considered an unviable alternative for news translation on the basis of the need to conform to readers’ needs and expectations [7-10]. The following example (1) demonstrates how translators handle ideologically disputable contents in E-to-C translation.

(1) Comparing abortion to the most murderous atrocities of the 20 century—“German death camps, Chinese purges, Stalin gulags, Cambodian killing fields, and the Rwanda genocide”—it makes performing one a felony, punishable by up to 99 years in prison.

将堕胎比作 20 世纪最残忍的暴行——“德国的死亡集中营，斯大林的古拉格集中营，柬埔寨的杀戮场，卢旺达的种族灭绝”——这使得堕胎成为重罪，最高可判处 99 年监禁。

Leaving aside the discussion of whether abortion should be punished and to which extent, it is the analogy made here that should be handled with discretion. The translated version simply skipped “Chinese purges” due to potential conflicts over it: some politicians and media accused China of “purging” people and making them vanish; China’s anti-corruption campaign was also interpreted by some media as eliminating dissidents and political enemies. Nevertheless, Chinese authorities have never acknowledged such accusations. Nor have these accusations been widely accepted by the majority of Chinese people.

Clearly, the translator is fully aware the risk of this statement and plays an active role of filter in face with the ideologically controversial content. In order to avoid unpleasant reaction and unnecessary confusion among Chinese readers, a domesticating strategy was adopted to omit the debatable content about China’s policy. Definitely, it is not our purpose to debate on ideological issues in this study, but to discuss how news reports involving them should be treated with caution in the process of translation. Some scholars have concerns for the “overuse” of domesticating strategies in news translation and propose to bring in a degree of foreignising in pursuit of a cosmopolitan ideal, but in the context of education or learning, it is high-risk to introduce a highly biased notion or viewpoint to students who have not yet formed a critical vision of the world or learners who are unfamiliar with political or ideological disputes.

Omission has been recognized as the most important translation strategy in news translation [8, 11]. Sorby [12], through studying the positive and negative words in English-Chinese news translation, pointed out that English news translated to Chinese may lose the informative function of the original text because Chinese tends to reveal strong disagreement or emotional response, thus causing misinterpretation and misunderstanding of the source news. If this is true, it is really advisable to avoid the risk by omitting or properly rewriting some extremely controversial content in news translation.

3.2. Mark and Label the One-Sided Ideologically News to Transfer Risk

In terms of political conflicts, the announcement or description of one side usually does not tell a version that both sides would agree on. For instance, VOA Standard English material 20200117 (1) mainly discussed the tension between the US and Iran. A major incident during that period of time was the assassination of General Qassem Soleimani from Iran, which was authorized by the US President Donald Trump. Surrounding this incident there exist many sides of the story, including those from the US, Iran and other countries and regions.

In the aforementioned material, VOA used “one of the world’s most deadly terrorists”, “terrorist warlords”, “brutal

repression of protesters in Iran”, “perpetrated countless acts of terror to destabilize the region” to describe the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps led by Soleimani and the Iran regime in an attempt to justify Soleimani’s death. However, after the incident, the Iranian military called the US air strike “a flagrant violation of Iraqi sovereignty and a clear breach by the American forces of their mandate which is exclusively to fight Islamic State and provide advice and assistance to Iraqi security forces”. And Soleimani was once referred to by Iran’s Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei as a “living martyr”. But these remarks were not in the stories produced by VOA.

In these cases, it is almost impossible to transform a one-sided story by omission or replacing words to maintain objective. This explains why the translator did not make any adjustments in translating examples (2-5).

(2) Now, with the targeted killing on January 3 of one of the world’s most deadly terrorists, IRGC Qods Force commander Qassem Soleimani, the military component of the strategy is on display.

如今,随着1月3日世界上最致命的恐怖分子之一的伊斯兰革命卫队圣城旅指挥官卡西姆·索莱马尼被有针对性击毙,这一战略的军事部分得以展现。

(3) As president Trump pointed out, for years under Soleimani’s leadership, the Revolutionary Guard Corps and the Qods Force injured and murdered hundreds of American service personnel and perpetrated countless acts of terror to destabilize the region.

正如特朗普总统指出的那样,多年来,在索莱马尼的领导下,革命卫队和圣城旅伤害和杀害了数百名美国军人,并犯下了无数破坏该地区稳定的恐怖行为。

(4) Just recently, Soleimani led the brutal repression of protesters in Iran, where more than a thousand innocent civilians were tortured and killed by their own government.

就在最近,索莱马尼在伊朗领导了对抗议者的残酷镇压,超过1000名无辜平民被他们自己的政府折磨和杀害。

(5) The future, President Trump stated, belongs to the people of Iran, those who seek peaceful coexistence and cooperation, not the terrorist warlords who plunder their nation to finance bloodshed abroad.

未来,特朗普总统称,属于伊朗人民,属于寻求和平共处与合作的人民,而不是为了在海外资助流血而掠夺其国家的恐怖主义军阀。

Without any doubt, there is stark contrast rooted in their different ideology and the narrative was meant to be one-sided. This poses a great challenge for translators if they want to strike the balance between being faithful to the source text and being responsible for the target readers. Is there a possibility to objectively report the news, and simultaneously not misleading Chinese readers through the strongly-biased ideology?

One possible strategy we advise here is to mark or label this kind of material as one-sided to transfer the potential risk of communication. A new trend emerges as mainstream social media in both China and the US take further steps to regulate information circulated on them—messages with false claims and potentially huge impact are labeled. Twitter added “Get the facts about mail-in ballots” to Donald J. Trump’s two

tweets on May 26, 2020 that suggested mail-in ballots will be “substantially fraudulent” and “this will be a Rigged Election”. Twitter also labeled another Trump’s tweet on May 29, 2020, as violating “the Twitter Rules about glorifying violence”. In this tweet, Trump wrote “when the looting starts, the shooting starts”, which many media interpreted as a threat to shoot protesters. Chinese social media Weibo also labeled some misinformation. Therefore it is suggested that an online English learning platform like Qingting English can learn from the practices of these social media and mark/label the ideologically disputable content when the activity of translation is insufficient to process them.

Evidently, there is a great opportunity for readers to come into contact with and thus acquire new knowledge and understanding of foreign realities, i.e. the cosmopolitan potential of world news. As Schäffner [10] remarks: “Translation involves crossing linguistic, geographical and political spaces. The resulting encounters with the ‘other’ should lead to new modes of thinking, feeling, and experiencing the world”. For this reason, Bielsa [13-15] advocates foreignising approach in news translation in order to expose rather than obscure cultural and linguistic difference. The mark/label strategy we suggest above is an echo to Bielsa’s foreignising approach because no controversial content is omitted. In contrast with the above-suggested domesticating strategy, foreignising maintains the original information as well as the attitude of the source text. Meanwhile, marking/labeling the source text as one-sided gives readers some clues to explore more and encourages them to find a bigger picture of the on-going events that the news is about, thus transfers the risk of communication to other relevant sources.

4. Translation of Complex Informative Sentences: Shift Unit to Mitigate Risk

As pointed out above, news language is extremely informative. The distribution of information among sentences, however, is presented differently in English and in Chinese, due to their respective linguistic properties. It is widely recognized that English is a hypotactic language and Chinese is paratactic, which means more coordinating or subordinating conjunctions are used in English sentences. English news, therefore, is able to include rich information in a single sentence. When translated into Chinese, a complex sentence is usually divided into several sentences to reduce difficulty of the learners’ understanding, namely to effect the communicative success between the translator and the target readers. This strategy is also known as unit shift, by which a complex sentence is separated into two units by a full stop or that the colon has been replaced by the coordinating conjunction “and” [16].

Considering the distinction between hypotactic English and paratactic Chinese, many complex long constructions in English news need to be reorganized in the process of translation to produce idiomatic Chinese target text. What

follows are a few examples of awkward translation strictly following the original construction of English source text.

(6) So all told, it is conceivable and not that it will happen but it could happen, that up to 3 meters of global sea level could be unleashed onto us.

所以说，这是可以想象的，不是说它会发生，而是可能发生，我们可能突然发生高达3米的全球海平面上升。

The translated clause in example (6) “我们可能突然发生高达3米的全球海平面上升” is in effect ungrammatical in Chinese and the whole sentence is not idiomatic because the translator rigidly copied the original English construction. “不是说它会发生” is not acceptable Chinese expression either. To avoid such awkward translation, news translators should beware of the communicative risk of using European-style Chinese. In effect, these weird expressions and sentence patterns emerged under the influence of English will not help but simply block learners in understanding the original news. Our suggestion in this case is to break through the original structure of the English sentence and reorganize it into more idiomatic Chinese. A more appropriate translation is “所以说，可以想象的是，高达3米的全球海平面上升可能突然发生在我们身上。这不一定必然发生，但确有可能”。

Example (7) is another example of poor translation that mechanically copies the structure of the English sentence without any management of the communication risk.

(7) Analysts say Biden's connection to Barack Obama, America's first black president, is an asset in a state with a large African-American community.

分析人士说，拜登与奥巴马的关系，美国第一位黑人总统，对一个拥有庞大的非裔美国人社区的州来说是一笔资产。

Here “America's first black president”, the appositive of “Barack Obama”, when translated, was not moved to a position that fits Chinese grammar, namely, before the noun “Barack Obama”. In addition, typical Chinese usually puts the adverbial of place at the beginning, rather than at the end, of a statement. Therefore, it should be better if translated as “分析人士说，在一个拥有庞大非裔美国人群体的州里，拜登与美国第一位黑人总统奥巴马的关系是很有价值的”。

Worse than the above two examples (6-7), the Chinese translation in example (8) is barely readable, which poses an extremely high risk in communication with the learners.

(8) And as freshmen, we were one of the last ones if we want, but generally like when they get down to us the questions have been asked.

作为新人，如果我们愿意，但一般来说，轮到 we 开始问问题的时候，我们是最后一部分人。

The original sentence in (8) is from an interview and the structure of the source text is not fully grammatical. To mitigate the communicative risk, a professional translator is required to make some adjustments to produce readable results in the target language. With the aid of context, the translator could understand the source sentence which means “As freshmen, we are the last ones to be asked questions even if we want to be asked. And when we are finally asked, the questions have been asked.” Therefore the Chinese

translation is better supplemented and modified as “作为新人，就算希望回答问题，也只能在最后才有机会，但真正轮到我们的时候，问题通常都已经被问过了”。

Example (8) is representative of another hurdle in news translation: spoken English news. News involves interviews, in which interviewees usually respond to questions spontaneously and sometimes produce fragmented and ungrammatical sentences. When the transcripts provided to translators might faithfully record what the speakers say, professional and responsible translators have the duty to manage the communicative risk by referring back to the original audio, obtaining the key information correctly and adopt domestication approach to reorganize the original constructions in the target text, for the sake of communicative success with the learners of the platform.

To recap, translation involves more transformation of utterance than repetition of utterance. When translating English news to Chinese we need to take into account the different characteristics of both languages and produce readable and fluent version for target readers. Naturally, more attention should be paid to the learners' need to maximize the communication effect in translation of news for a leaning APP.

5. Fixing Errors of Source Transcripts to Mitigate Risk of Uncertainty

There are circumstances when the audio news is transcribed wrong, which is possibly the error of voice recognition software or editors. When the transcript is wrong grammatically or semantically, it will inevitably lead to an increase of uncertainty risk for translators, who usually resort to guesswork as the following two examples show.

(9) US President Donald Trump has openly rejected the climate science and supported coal and other polluting industries, who tarnish warned there is a price to pay for inaction.

美国总统唐纳德·特朗普公开反对气候科学，并支持煤炭和其他污染行业。特朗普警告称，不作为是要付出代价的。

In example (9), “Guterres” was mistaken as “who tarnish”, resulting in an ungrammatical sentence and an evident semantic conflict. How come Donald Trump rejected climate science and simultaneously warned that “we would pay for inaction”? The translator skipped the word “tarnish” and took it as a relative clause, translating it as “特朗普警告称 (Trump warned)”, which clearly betrayed the original meaning. A similar mistake can be found in example (10).

(10) But this was the worst possible way to have that conversation, because it's such a naked exercise, on the part of President to try to do exactly what the first member hits, which is government interference with freedom of speech.

但这是进行这种对话最糟糕的方式，因为这是一种赤裸裸的行动，特朗普试图做第一位美国总统所做的事情，即政府干涉言论自由。

“The First Amendment prohibits” was mistaken as “the first member hits”, probably because “amendment” and

“prohibits” are both polysyllabic and the speaker mumbled quickly, making it difficult to be recognized. The translation is utterly misled by the transcript stating “特朗普试图做第一位美国总统所做的事情(on the part of President to try to do exactly what the first president did)”, which is right the opposite of the historical fact and a disastrous mistake.

Although this kind of problem is mostly the fault of voice recognition software or the editor of the transcript, a responsible translator with risk awareness should refer back to the speech (audio track) when transcripts appear to be grammatically or semantically wrong or suspicious, so as to mitigate the risk of uncertainty and provide faithful information of the original news to the target learners.

6. Conclusion

The present study applied the risk management approach in news translation from English to Chinese. Through ten examples by Qingting English app, we discussed translation of ideologically disputable news and complex informative sentences. Facing the ideologically disputable content, a translator could choose either to omit some content or to mark/label the strongly biased report in order to avoid or transfer the potential risks. Both domestication and foreignising approaches proved to be useful for a translator to be faithful, objective and responsible. However, the domestication strategy is preferable in the translating of English complex sentences into Chinese since it can minimize the communication risk between the translator and the target learners. To reduce the uncertainty risk, a responsible translator sometimes needs to fix errors of the source audio or text to exactly comprehend the original news so as to assure the credibility of the platform.

It should also be pointed out that some of the translation versions are suspected to be purely the results of machine translation without proper revision by professional translators. The value of machine translation is to reduce human labor of repeating the same work, but it is clearly imperfect, especially when translating ungrammatical sentences in spoken English. The quality of translation, then, relies to a large extent on the revision and post-editing of human translators with risk awareness. Undoubtedly, the risk management approach does not offer ready-made solutions or techniques to deal with all problems of news translation. Nevertheless, our study adds fresh evidence to the conclusion that translation activity is way beyond a purely cross-linguistic and intercultural event, but a complex project of risk assessment and management.

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