

# Translation Study on Terms and Sentences with Particular Chinese Features Based on a Micro-self-built Corpus

Liu Jingni

**Abstract**—On the basis of two corpora of political and economic terms and sentences with particular Chinese features from *China Daily* (English version) and *The New York Times*, ranging from August 2019 to January 2020, a comparable analysis is made to find out the strategy of rendering those words in the news together with their lexical features. Statistics reveal an overall foreignization tendency, along with various factors imposing impacts on the process, which is examined from the perspective of both translation and linguistics.

**Index Terms**—Translation, terms and sentences with particular Chinese characters, political and economic terms and sentences, self-building corpus.

## I. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, strategies adopted while western and Chinese news media’s translating China-related words into English have attached scholars’ attention in China. Wang Xiangbin (2002) [1], Jia Hui (2008) [2], Yu Qiuping (2013) [3], Yang Tingyu (2019) [4] have made comparisons of words on the same topic in English between Chinese media version and western one and conducted the tendency of translation methods and strategies. Meanwhile, with the introduction and development of corpus linguistics, many language researchers, ranging from Fan Xu (2013) [5] to Hu Kaibao together with Xie Lixin (2017) [6] have been trying to apply parallel corpus to the translation study, which has been proved to be effective to discover some cross-linguistic correspondences along with differences in contrastive studies. However, only pragmatic factors of the text or translation methods have been analyzed and no comparison between terms with particular Chinese features in news at home and abroad have been made from the perspective of linguistics. Such studies are not enough and now badly needed for people in the field of both linguistics and translation.

To fill the gap, this study aims to verify translation strategies and methods used in translating terms and sentences with particular Chinese features in real corpus as well as vocabulary features from the perspective of linguistics along with the reasons that make the difference, which may not only provide specific research strategies and guidance for foreign translators who work for foreign publicity, but also offer vivid examples for qualified translators or English learners in China.

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Jingni Liu is with Television School, Communication University of China, Beijing, China (e-mail: michelle6112@163.com).

## II. DATA COLLECTION

*China Daily* (CND), an influential English-language newspaper in China with the widest print circulation was founded in 1981. It serves those who are foreigners in China as well as those who wish to improve their English, and is often used as a guide to Chinese government policy from all perspectives, ranging from military to environment. While *The New York Times* (NYT), founded in 1851, has worldwide influence and readership, winning 127 Pulitzer Prizes more than any other newspaper (Victor, 2018) [7]. Therefore, it is authoritative to have an analysis of how and why political and economic terms and sentences with particular Chinese features are expressed or translated differently under the background of localization and globalization.

To obtain the proper data, the corpus software AntConc and Readability Analyzer have been applied. The comparative method and corpus-based approach are the guiding methodologies employed in this study. One cannot understand the characteristics of a text without making comparison of parallel texts. News from CND and NYT on same topics, including Hong Kong protests, the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of the People’s Republic of China, Xinjiang, Taiwan and COVID-19 from 1<sup>st</sup> August 2019 to 31<sup>st</sup> January 2020 are collected through corpora to make it more credible.

## III. DATA ANALYSIS

### A. Statistical Results Based on Self-built Corpus

#### 1) TTR

TABLE I: THE TTR OF CND AND NYT CORPORA

File	Token	Type	TTR
CND	4629	1680	36.3
NYT	1877	888	47.3

By observing the TTR, we could know that the TTR of NYT corpus is bigger than that of CND, which means NYT has a greater word diversity as a native English speaker media than CND.

#### 2) Reading ease

TABLE II: READING EASE OF CND AND NYT CORPORA

File	Reading Ease
CND	22
NYT	32

Reading ease test rates text on a 100-point scale. The higher the score, the easier it is for readers to understand the document. The following table is its standard.

TABLE III: SCORE MAPPING TABLE

Reading Ease Score	Readability Level
0-29	Very difficult
30-49	Difficult
50-59	Fairly difficult
60-69	Standard
70-79	Fairly easy
80-89	Easy
90-100	Very easy

From Table II and Table III, we can see that the texts in CND set 22 points, which means that its readability level is “very difficult”, while texts in NYT get 32 points, signifying that the level is “difficult”. And because this software, designed by two professors from Beijing Foreign Studies University, is created for Chinese students, that is for those who learn English as a foreign language, not for those whose native language is English. Therefore, it can be signified that it’s hard for English learners to get useful information from English news from both media. What is more, the result that the texts in CND are even harder than those in NYT can show that the Chinese media always use more complex words and long compound sentences in their reports, leading to a higher reading difficulty score.

3) Frequency

TABLE IV: WORD FREQUENCY RANK OF CND

Rank	Frequency	Word
1	84	China
2	34	Chinese
3	31	System
4	29	People
5	27	Party
6	19	State
7	16	Country/National/Development
8	15	New/Committee

TABLE V: WORD FREQUENCY RANK OF NYT

Rank	Frequency	Word
1	30	Chinese
2	22	China
3	12	Communist
4	10	People/Party
5	9	Government
6	7	Xi
7	6	Beijing/Mainland
8	5	National/State-run

From the above tables, it can be shown that although the words “China”, “Chinese”, “people” and “party” are the top 5 most frequently-used in both CND and NYT. The former media pays more attention to introduce its development in all aspects in recent years and modernized law-abiding system to the rest of the world while the later prefers transferring the message that the core leader, namely Xi, the Communist Party of China, the central government and everything that is related to the state without democracy is truly characteristics of mainland China.

B. Statistical Results of Different Translation Methods and Strategies

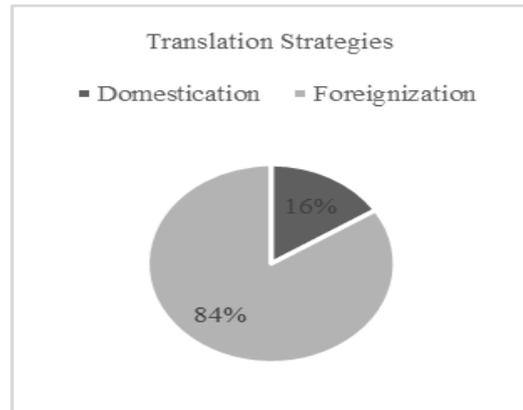


Fig. 1. The percentage of translation strategies of CND.

TABLE VI: THE PERCENTAGE OF TRANSLATION METHODS OF CND

Strategy	Number	Percentage
Literal Translation	366	76.7%
Free Translation	76	15.9%
Literal Translation with Explanation	16	3.4%
Literal Translation with Transliteration	16	3.4%
Transliteration with Explanation	3	0.6%
Total	477	100%

This pie chart shows the figure of domestication strategy is about five times as much as that of foreignization, which means when Chinese media translators choose the translation strategy of terms with particular Chinese features in political and business news, most of them will prefer applying the foreignization translation strategy as the starting point, namely the way that keeps the characteristics of the original culture and language.

And by observing Table VI, it can be found that literal translation is used frequently with 76.7% of total translation methods while other translation methods take up only the most 23.3% in all, suggesting that literal translation is the most common method used in foreignization choices.

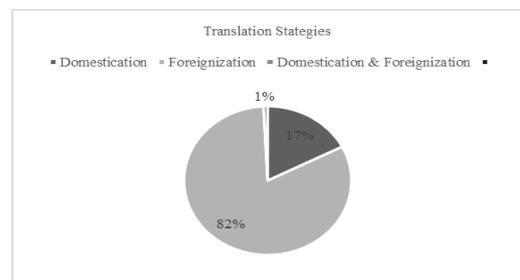


Fig. 2. The percentage of translation strategies of NYT.

TABLE VII: THE PERCENTAGE OF TRANSLATION METHODS OF NYT

Strategy	Number	Percentage
Literal Translation	72	40.3%
Free Translation	31	17.3%
Literal Translation with Explanation	41	22.9%
Literal Translation with Transliteration	7	3.9%

Transliteration with Explanation	28	15.6%
Total	179	100%

As can be seen from the figure, foreignization accounts for 82%, far outweighing domestication and the combination of both of them, inferring that western news media also believe that special cultural factors should be taken as a priority to help readers unveil facts of the oriental when translating. According to Table VII, literal translation and literal translation with explanation are used frequently with 40.3% and 22.9% of the total translation methods respectively followed by free translation (17.3%) and transliteration with explanation (15.6%).

### C. Exemplification of Translation Methods

As there are more than 600 examples, typical ones of different types are chosen as follows.

#### 1) Examples in China Daily

##### a) Literal translation

Table VI shows that literal translation occupies an overwhelming percentage of 76.7%.

(1) 不忘初心、牢记使命。

Stay true to our founding mission.

(2) 中国烈士纪念日

China's Martyrs' Day

(3) 瓜熟蒂落，水到渠成。

When a melon is ripe, it falls off its stem; and when water flows, a channel is formed.

(4) 澳人治澳

The people of Macao governing Macao

The above examples are vivid and figurative, revealing that the literal translation can express our country's political situation together with policy in various stages and reflect the distinctive features of socialism with Chinese characteristics. The alien cultural flavor helps the readers not only appreciate Chinese culture but also provide a new way of thinking that will not lead to any difficulty in understanding thanks to its according with English semantic and syntactic structure.

##### b) Literal translation with explanation

As Table VI shows, literal translation with explanation takes up about 3.4% of the total translation methods.

(5) 国务院办公厅

The State Council, or China's cabinet

(6) 光头刘Sir

An officer from the Kwai Chung Police Station surnamed Lau. Lau, known as "bald sergeant Lau Sir",

(7) 留守儿童

Left behind children who lack effective guardianship as their parents are away working in better-paying jobs in big cities

(8) 信访

Petitioning, also known as "letters and calls", one kind of China's administrative systems for hearing public complaints and proposals in areas

If the above are translated only with the method of literal translation, readers may be confused due to the lack of background information about Chinese culture, history and system along with omission in Chinese language that is

caused by the emphasis on parallel structure, repetition or four-character phrases. Only by adding additional explanatory texts, can the semantic meaning be completely and clearly transferred to English readers, improving the conciseness of language and efficiency of communication.

##### c) Literal translation with transliteration

Terms and sentences with the methods of literal translation with transliteration takes up 3.4% and they are always something relate to place, such as "湘西土家族苗族自治州" (Xiangxi Tujia and Miao autonomous prefecture), "北斗卫星导航系统" (the Beidou navigation system), "上海浦东新区" (Shanghai's Pudong New Area) and "古田全军政治工作会议" (The Gutian military political work meeting).

##### d) Transliteration with explanation

(9) 中关村

Zhongguancun, a suburban area of the capital sometimes called China's Silicon Valley.

(10) 户口

The hukou, household registration

(11) 火神山医院

The Huoshenshan hospital, an emergency specialty hospital under construction in response to the outbreak

This method is the least used one when CND news translate political and business terms and sentences with particular Chinese features with the percentage of 0.6%. Chinese "Pinyin" stands out as the most vital way of transliteration, which is simple and straightforward to describe the national along with cultural characteristics, but hard for western readers without Chinese cultural background to understand.

##### e) Free translation

It is found that free translation accounts for 15.9% and specific examples are as follows:

(12) 外来务工人员

Migrant worker

(13) 双开

Be expelled from the Communist Party of China and removed from public office

(14) 开通绿色通道

Provide fast access for senior citizens to quality medical treatment

(15) 双方唇齿相依、安危与共。

China and the Central Asian countries "share weal and woe."

(16) 要求各地决不能撒胡椒面、搞平均分配。

All parts of the country should be dedicated to ensuring implementation of the policy.

The above example "migrant worker" is an English inherent phrase, but semantically slightly different from the Chinese original word. The interpretation of the phrase in Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English is "someone who goes to another area or country, especially in order to find work (Liu, 2012)", while migrant workers in China are those who move from the rural to the urban because of work. Moreover, "小康" is a word with high frequency in Chinese society, and the translation group of the 16th National Congress has decided to translation it as "well-off". "撒胡椒面" is also a term with Chinese characteristics, whose

meaning is distributing something equally, not considering relative importance and is actually not related to “pepper (胡椒)” or “noddle (面)”. The translation of “双开” is not “double on”, and “绿色通道” is not “green pass”, as the true meaning of those words are different from their literal meaning. Therefore, free translation, as a supplementary is essential to make the original one not only smooth and fluent, but also acceptable to Chinese culture. Translators, when applying this method, pay more attention to the meaning rather than the form and details. In other words, retaining the original spirit and meaning is much more important than the alterations of the original pattern and sentence structure.

## 2) Examples in *The New York Times*

### a) *Literal translation*

According to Table VII, there are 40.3% political and business terms and sentences with particular Chinese features in NYT are translated with the method of literal translation. And they can also be classified into three kinds—proverbs, Chinese culture and history, along with systems—which is slightly differently from what CND can be itemized. Specific examples are as follows:

#### (1) 杀鸡儆猴

To kill a chicken to scare the monkey

#### (2) 光棍

Bare branch

#### (3) 红卫兵

The Red Guards

#### (4) 黄昏恋

“Twilight love”

The first four examples are the first kind, proverb translation. It cannot be denied that many Chinese flavor together with cultural elements are kept through this method, however, it may confuse readers to some extent. For instance, “杀鸡儆猴” is a four-character word from *The Book of Changes*, a Chinese classical masterpiece and its surface meaning is truly “to kill a chicken to scare the monkey”. Nevertheless, without knowing the story of Qi Jingong in the Spring and Autumn period, most of westerners would never understand that it signifies an act of warning A by giving B a punishment. What is more, undeniably, “光” is “bare” and “棍” is “branch” in English, but “光棍”, a word with metaphor, is not a part of tree, but bachelor. (5) and (6) should be dealt with the same way. “红卫兵” is a word related to the Cultural Revolution from 1966 to 1976 and “黄昏恋” is also a metaphor whose “黄昏” represents the senior citizen.

### b) *Literal translation with explanation*

#### (5) 习大大

Uncle Xi, a popular nickname for Mr. Xi

#### (6) 广场舞大妈

“Singing aunties”, middle-aged women who sing pop songs through loudspeakers in Mandarin, the primary form of Chinese spoken in the mainland

#### (7) 北京比基尼

“Beijing bikini”, or the practice of men rolling up their shirts and baring their bellies in the summer

#### (8) 红船精神

“Red boat spirit,” a term used by Mr. Xi and other party

leaders to encourage the masses to emulate the drive of the party’s founders

The method literal translation with explanation ranks the second among all the translation methods, taking up 22.9%. More specifically, it can also be further divided into kinds. The first one is translation of “people”, such as nickname or group name, like (5) and (6). Chinese specific “ideology” translation is the second while specific social, political, historic and economic phenomenon is the last.

### c) *Literal translation with transliteration*

This method, accounting for 3.9 %, is often used to translate places, such as “南湖” (Nanhu Lake), “娄山关” (Loushan Pass) and “盒马鲜生” (Hema grocery stores), while it is rarely for political and economic terms and sentences.

### d) *Transliteration with explanation*

Based on Table VII, transliteration with explanation makes up a relatively significant share (15.6%).

#### (9) 阴阳合同

“Yin and yang” contracts, a common means of avoiding taxes in China

#### (10) 代购

“Daigous”, or black-market purchasing agents

#### (11) 抖音

Douyin, the Chinese version of the short-video platform TikTok

#### (12) 应收尽收

“Ying shou jin shou”—“Round up everyone who should be rounded up”

All in all, foreignization translation strategy and literal translation method are mainly applied in expressing political and economic terms and sentences with particular Chinese characters at home and abroad. Both of them tend to retain the foreignness of alien characteristics and keep faithful to the original Chinese version. And CND with more lengthy sentences and words is much more difficult for English readers to capture the idea than NYT, a western one with the diversity of words and an emphasis on ideology.

### e) *Free translation*

Free translation gives leeway to translators, but they much reproduce the essence of the original without personal favors and emotions added. As a method that takes up 17.3% of the total, free translation, in fact, takes making readers understand as a priority. For example, “撒欢儿” is “gambol” or “frisk” to some extent, but “run wild” is more vivid and figurative. “热搜”, if translated with the method of literal translation, is “hot search”, but the true meaning with details is “the most searched-for phrases”.

## D. *Different Translation Versions and Reasons*

Comparing the translation of terms and sentences of the same topic in CND with that of NYT, a great number of differences can be found and further discussed based on three reasons as follows:

The first reason is the language characteristic of NYT news. Direct speech and indirect speech are frequently used to improve the sense of reality in NYT. Simultaneously, reporter’s professional skills and personal ideas of China are proved by foreignization translation strategy, especially

literal translation and transliteration methods applied. Secondly, English readers are willing to have a deeper understanding of the oriental country, therefore, reporters are encouraged to keep the alien flavor of some specific words with Chinese characteristics. Explanation can be added to make the language understandable and acceptable. Most importantly, ideology is the key factor when translating political terms and sentences. The most distinct characteristic is NYT's stress on China's single-party system by adding adjectives along with nouns like "state-run", "CPC-based", "hierarchical", "centralized control" and "communist rule" to pose an impact on American readers that everything in China is dominated by the central government and CPC without democracy and Chinese news organizations are propaganda departments. Secondly, from the perspective of territory, namely anything related to Hong Kong, Taiwan, Xinjiang and Tibet, NYT and CND have totally different expressions. For example, in NYT, Hong Kong, a "semiautonomous region", violent protests are "peaceful anti-government protests". Hong Kong government is "the post-colonial government" suppressed by mainland China and protesters who are for violence are "pro-democracy" while others are "pro-Beijing", to give readers an impression that the opposite side of democracy is not dictatorship, but Beijing, in other words, Chinese central government. Furthermore, Taiwan is regarded as "a self-governing island off China's southern coast" or "a self-ruled democratic island considered a breakaway province by Beijing" by NYT, which violated "One China" principle supported by American government officially. Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region government is a "titular autonomous administrations in non-majority-Han area" that will detain one million or more Muslim Uighurs and place them in "re-education" camps, "concentration camps" or "internment camp" where they are forced to renounce their religious belief and embrace the ideology of the Communist Party. Democracy is considered to disappear in mainland China, except that time of "the 1989 Tiananmen Square massacre", "The 2014 Umbrella movement" and "The Sunflower Movement of 2014". Thirdly, China's anti-aggression wars and health problems are also translated differently by NYT and CND. CND uses "the War of Resistance Against Japan" to depict the Second World War between China and Japan from 1931 to 1945 in order to address the cruel aggression of Japanese Fascist and brave resist of Chinese people, while "the Sino-Japanese war" is applied by NYT to briefly make a conclusion. What is more, before World Health Organization has named COVID-19, some reporters had used "Chinese Coronavirus", a racist expression to express the new pneumonia-like virus in their news.

In a word, due to different language characteristics, target readers and ideology, there are a great number of different translation versions on Chinese specific political and economic terms and sentences in NYT and CND.

#### IV. CONCLUSION AND REFLECTION

##### A. Findings

Through the research and analysis based on the

self-building parallel corpus, the following findings can be acquired.

Firstly, in the practice of translating political and economic terms and sentences with particular Chinese features in news, both Chinese and western news translators are more like to adopt foreignization translation strategy and literal translation methods. Both of them tend to retain the foreignness of alien characteristics and keep faithful to the original Chinese version.

Secondly, CND with more lengthy sentences and words is much more difficult for English readers to capture the idea than NYT, a western one with the diversity of words and an emphasis on ideology.

Thirdly, due to different language characteristics, target readers and ideology, there are a great number of different translation versions on Chinese specific political and economic terms and sentences in NYT and CND, especially on laying emphasis on China's single-party system, territory, anti-aggression wars together with health problems.

##### B. Limitations and Expectations

Due to the limited data and time, it cannot be denied that there are some limitations that can be perfect in the future study.

Firstly, because the corpus is a comparatively self-building small-sized one, only containing about 600 terms and sentences, it still cannot cover a wide range of data and materials. The data collected from restricted information sources are still far from enough and more effective and reliable texts should be added.

Secondly, owing to the limitation of time and the author's academic attainment, the present study is somewhat limited, only discussing political and business terms and sentences with particular Chinese features roughly.

In light of the major findings generated from this research, more materials and examples related to political and economic terms and sentences with particular Chinese features are encouraged to be collected and analyzed, bringing more fruitful findings.

#### CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares no conflict of interest

#### AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Jingni Liu conducted the research, analyzed the data and wrote the paper. She had approved the final version.

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**Liu Jingni** was born in Changsha, Hunan Province, China on 31st May, 1998. She was an undergraduate student in Beijing Forestry University, majoring in English with the field of English-Chinese translation from 2016 to 2020, and now is a graduate student in Communication University of China, majoring in international journalism.

She has been an intern respondent at China News

Service, an intern producer at Hunan TV and an intern interpreter at Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs of the People's Republic of China. Her published papers include "Adaptation in English Translation of Horticulture Expo Beijing 2019 Public Signs" on *Wenjiaozhiliao*, May. 2020, together with "A Comparison of the Cross-Cultural Translation of Names between the Two English Versions of Hong Lou Meng --Based on Theories of Cultural Default and Translation Compensation" on *Cultural Industry*, Feb. 2020. Her current research interest is international journalism and communication.