

On the Translation of English News Headlines: Taking North-China Daily News as an Example

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Abstract: English news newspapers are prevalent in our lives. In the current information era, people's information-selection patterns have become increasingly "fast-food" oriented. News headlines, serving as not only the titles but also the essence of news reports, are now used by readers as a quick guide to scan for interesting content. Hence, news headlines are of great significance in English news, rendering newspaper headline translation particularly crucial. This paper takes North-China Daily News, one of the most influential and widely circulated newspapers in modern China, as an example. By analyzing specific news headlines, it elaborates on the language features of news headlines, covering lexical, grammatical, rhetorical, and syntactic aspects. Based on these features, this research explores translation strategies for English news headlines, aiming to assist English learners in better understanding and translating them, and to help rediscover the unique charm of printed newspaper content in the digital age.

Keywords: News Headlines; Language Features; Translation; Strategies

1. Introduction

In the contemporary world inundated with information, English news has become an integral part of our daily lives. Whether it is for keeping abreast of global affairs, enhancing language skills, or satisfying curiosity, people turn to English news sources. Among these, the news headline serves as the gateway to the entire news content [1]. It is the first element that catches the reader's eye, and in most cases, it determines whether the reader will proceed to read the full news article.

The significance of news headline translation cannot be overstated. However, news headline translation is far from a simple mechanical

process. It requires a deep understanding of the language features, cultural connotations, and the intended message behind the headlines [2]. This paper focuses on the language features of English news headlines and proposes corresponding translation strategies. By taking North-China Daily News, a newspaper that had a profound impact on the news landscape in modern China, as a case study, we can gain valuable insights into the unique characteristics of news headlines and how to translate them proficiently.

2. Functions of English News Headlines

2.1 Outlining the News

The primary function of a news headline is to provide a concise summary of the news content. When readers skim through a newspaper or an online news platform, they rely on the headline to quickly grasp the main idea of the news item. A well-crafted headline can accurately convey the who, what, where, when, and sometimes even why and how of the news event. In the context of North-China Daily News, headlines such as "COTTON STRIKE IN U.S." clearly state that there is a strike in the cotton-related industry in the United States. This allows readers with an interest in labor issues or the cotton market to decide whether to delve deeper into the story [3].

2.2 Appealing Function

In a competitive media environment, where countless news stories vie for the reader's attention, an appealing headline is essential. A headline that is vivid, interesting, or thought-provoking can draw in readers who might otherwise skip over the news item. Editors use various techniques to make headlines appealing, such as employing rhetorical devices, using strong and vivid language, or creating a sense of mystery. For example, "A DREAM OF BLUE AND WHITE" in North-

China Daily News evokes imagery of Chinese porcelain, appealing to readers interested in art and cultural history [4].

To create an appealing headline, editors might also use emotional language. In the context of North-China Daily News, during a time of political unrest, a headline like "Political Turmoil: Hope on the Horizon?" creates a sense of anticipation. The use of a question mark makes the reader wonder what the "hope" might be, compelling them to read further. This not only increases the readership of the particular news item but also helps the newspaper stand out among its competitors.

3. Features of English News Headlines

3.1 Lexical Features

3.1.1 Using simple and short words or phrases
News headlines often favor simple and short words for several reasons. Firstly, space is a premium, especially in print newspapers where headlines need to fit within a certain layout. Short words help in creating a more compact and visually appealing headline. Secondly, simple words are more accessible to a broader range of readers, regardless of their language proficiency.

In North-China Daily News, we can find numerous examples of such headlines. For instance:

COTTON STRIKE IN U.S. (Meiguo Fangzhi Gongren Bagong)

A BEAUTY CONTEST (Xuanmei Bisai)

NEW CANTON POLITICS (Guangzhou Xinzheng)

A POSTAL CONVENTION (Youzheng Gongyue)

A RIOT IN CAIRO (Kailuo Baodong)

NOTES OF A TRAVELLER (Lüxing Youji)

TRAVEL AND EXPLORATION (Lüxing Yu Tansuo)

VICTORY AND LIBERTY (Shengli Yu Ziyou)

These short and simple words not only save space but also ensure quick comprehension for the reader. Moreover, short words can sometimes pack a more powerful punch. In North-China Daily News, a headline such as "RIOT ERUPTS" uses the short verb "ERUPTS" to vividly describe the sudden and chaotic start of a riot, which are concise and easily understood [5]. This simplicity in language also allows for easier memorability.

Readers are more likely to remember a headline with simple and impactful words, which can be beneficial for the newspaper's brand and the dissemination of important news stories.

3.1.2 Using abbreviations and acronyms

Abbreviations and acronyms are commonly used in news headlines to achieve brevity. An abbreviation is a shortened form of a word, while an acronym is formed by taking the first letter of each word in a phrase. In North-China Daily News, we see examples like "Important Suspension of Traffic on C. E. R." where "C. E. R." stands for Chinese Eastern Railway. This not only saves space but also is a common practice in news reporting to refer to well-known organizations, institutions, or geographical entities. Other common abbreviations in the newspaper include:

"A. D. C." (Amateur Dramatic Club of Shanghai)

"R. A.F." (Royal Air Force)

"S. M. C." (Shanghai Municipal Council)

Afr. = Africa/African Co. = Company

Cent. = Centigrade amt. = Amount

Hup. = Hubei Hun. = Hunan

Kwei. = Guizhou Kir. = Jilin

Kan. = Gansu

Though abbreviations and acronyms need some prior knowledge or context, they are efficient for news editors to convey information concisely.

Over time, some abbreviations and acronyms have become so ingrained in the news vocabulary that they are widely recognized. For example, "UN" for the United Nations or "NASA" for the National Aeronautics and Space Administration. In the context of North-China Daily News, as it was a newspaper with a regional and historical focus, the use of abbreviations like "S. V. C." (Shanghai Volunteer Corps) was relevant to the local readership.

However, for a more global or modern-day audience, additional context might be needed. Newspapers often provide explanations or use the full name in the initial reference and then switch to the abbreviation in subsequent mentions to ensure clarity. This practice of using abbreviations and acronyms has also extended to online news, where character limits in social media shares or mobile-friendly displays make them even more practical.

3.2 Grammatical Features

3.2.1 Frequently use present tense

Despite the fact that news events usually occur in the past, news headlines often use the simple present tense. This is to give the news a sense of immediacy and freshness, as if the events are happening right at the moment of reading. For example, "BOLIVIA ISSUES STATEMENT" uses present tense to enhance relevance and engage readers as if witnessing events in real-time [6]. "AIR FORCE ASSISTS IN HEATH FIRES" also uses the present tense to bring the action of the air force's assistance to the forefront. The present tense engages readers better, making news seem more vivid and immediate.

The use of the present tense in news headlines also has a psychological impact on the reader. It creates a sense of urgency, making the news seem more important and relevant to the reader's current situation. In North-China Daily News, during historical events such as political uprisings, a headline like "Protesters Demand Reform" in the present tense makes the struggle and the demands of the protesters seem more immediate, drawing the reader into the story as if they are witnessing the events in real-time.

3.2.2 Frequently use non-finite verbs

To save space and convey specific temporal or action-related information, news headlines often rely on non-finite verbs. The infinitive "to" is frequently used to represent the future tense. For example, "DINNER TO ADMIRAL TYRWHITT" indicates that a dinner in honor of Admiral Tyrwhitt is going to take place in the future. The "-ing" participle is used to denote continuous action, as seen in "STAMPING OUT THE REMNANTS OF THE REVOLT", which implies that the action of stamping out the remnants is ongoing. These non-finite verb forms allow for a more concise way of expressing time and action in the limited space of a news headline.

The use of non-finite verbs also adds flexibility to news headlines. In North-China Daily News, a headline like "TRAINS TO RESUME SERVICE" uses the infinitive "to resume" to clearly state the future action of the trains starting to operate again. This concise use of non-finite verbs demonstrates how non-finite verbs clarify temporal meaning in limited space [7], making it an essential tool in news writing.

3.3 Rhetorical Features

3.3.1 Metaphor

Metaphor is a powerful rhetorical device used in news headlines to make them more vivid and engaging. It involves comparing two unrelated things to create a new understanding. In North-China Daily News, a headline like "LITTLE BIRDS" might be used metaphorically to refer to inexperienced or young individuals who are taking on a challenging task, similar to how little birds might bravely venture into the unknown. Another example, "EYES AS A FLAME" uses metaphor for an intense gaze, more impactful than literal.

Metaphors in news headlines can also help in simplifying complex concepts. For instance, in a financial news headline like "The Stock Market: A Roller Coaster Ride", the metaphor of a roller coaster effectively conveys the ups and downs, the excitement, and the unpredictability of the stock market. In North-China Daily News, during a time of cultural renaissance, a headline like "The Arts: A Beacon of Hope" uses the metaphor of a beacon to show how the arts are guiding and providing hope in a particular situation. This not only enriches headline meaning and emotional resonance [8], but also helps the reader quickly grasp the significance of the news in a more relatable way.

3.3.2 Pun

Puns in news headlines create humor, irony, or double meanings. In North-China Daily News, the headline "THE DANDEROUS MEAL" (translated as "Hongmen Yan" in Chinese) uses a pun. "Hongmen Yan" refers to a treacherous ancient Chinese banquet, and the English headline plays on "dangerous" and the cultural connotation of a risky meal. This pun not only makes the headline more interesting but also, for those familiar with the cultural reference, adds an extra layer of meaning.

Puns can also be used to create a light-hearted or satirical tone in news headlines. In North-China Daily News, a headline related to a diplomatic event could use a pun to comment on the nature of the negotiations, such as "Diplomats 'Walking on Eggshells' During Talks", where "walking on eggshells" is a common English idiom used metaphorically to describe a cautious situation, and in the context of the news, it adds a touch of irony and a more engaging element to the headline.

3.3.3 Antithesis

Antithesis involves setting two contrasting ideas or phrases side by side for emphasis. In news headlines, it can create a powerful impact. For example, "TWO'S COMPANY, THREE'S A CROWD" presents a clear contrast between the ideal state of two people being in harmony and the disruption caused when a third person joins. This kind of antithesis can be used in news related to relationships, group dynamics, or even political alliances where the balance between different parties is at stake.

In a political news context, a headline like "Unity vs. Division: The Battle for the Nation's Future" uses antithesis to highlight the two opposing forces at play. In North-China Daily News, during a period of economic transition, a headline such as "Growth and Decline: The Dual Faces of the Local Economy" sets the contrast between the positive aspect of growth and the negative aspect of decline. This not only makes the headline more attention-grabbing but also helps the reader quickly understand the complex situation being reported by presenting the two opposing elements in a clear and concise manner.

3.4 Syntactic Features

News headlines often simplify syntax by omitting functional words like articles (a/an/the), prepositions (in/on/at), conjunctions (and/but/or), and the verb "be" to maximize brevity while retaining core meaning. For example, "41,000 BRITISH SEAMEN LOST IN WAR" omits "were," and "THE AMOY, FORMOSA TEA TRADE" drops the conjunction "and" between locations. These omissions not only make the headlines more concise but also, in a way, align with the more telegraphic style often used in news reporting to quickly convey the most important information.

Omitting functional words (articles, prepositions, conjunctions, "be") in headlines not only streamlines syntax but also strengthens tone. In North-China Daily News, for example, "FIRE DAMAGES BUILDING" (without "has") feels immediate and impactful, "SHANGHAI FAIR OPENS" omits "the" prioritizes core information, demonstrating syntactic simplicity for impact [9]. Such simplification enables creative word orders, like "New Policy, Big Impact," which emphasizes cause and effect concisely by

removing unnecessary elements.

4. Approaches to Translating English News Headlines into Chinese

4.1 Literal Translation

Literal translation directly transfers source headlines to the target language, preserving form and word order when possible. Suitable for clear, simple headlines without significant cultural/idiomatic barriers. For example: "WRECKERS BEHIND AN ARMY" is literally translated as "Zhanhou Feixu", with direct word correspondence and accurate meaning. "WUCHANG FERRY DANGERS" becomes "Wuchang Dukou Weiji", effectively conveying the headline's essence through literal translation. This approach adheres to the principles of "smoothness" and "faithfulness" in translation, as it closely follows the original text and is easily understandable for Chinese readers who have a basic knowledge of the English words' equivalents in Chinese.

Literal translation preserves original style/tone for simple headlines. For example: "Sun Rises over the City" is literally "Taiyang Shengqi Zhaoyao Chengshi", maintaining the descriptive tone. "Rain Hits the Region" becomes "Yushui Xiji Gai Diqu", accurately and simply reflecting the original. However, literal translation isn't ideal for complex/culturally loaded headlines.

4.2 Free Translation

Free translation prioritizes conveying the headline's overall meaning over strict form adherence, ideal when literal translation would be unclear or lose cultural nuance. In North-China Daily News, "THE DANDEROUS MEAL" is freely translated as "Hongmen Yan", as the English phrase alone can't capture the Chinese historical connotation of a treacherous banquet. Another example: "A POLICY OF 'WAIT AND SEE'" becomes "'Jing Guan Qi Bian' Zhengce", effectively conveying the concept of waiting and observing through contextual adaptation. Here, free translation allows for a more natural and meaningful rendering in Chinese, taking into account the cultural and semantic nuances that might be lost in a literal translation.

Free translation adapts headlines to the target culture's context. For example, in North-China Daily News "A DREAM OF BLUE AND

WHITE"—likely referencing porcelain—might become "Qinghua Ci Zhi Meng" to highlight China's blue-and-white porcelain heritage. This conveys the original meaning while adding cultural depth for Chinese readers. However, it is essential for the translator to have a deep understanding of both the source and target cultures to ensure that the free translation remains accurate and relevant.

4.3 Transliteration

Transliteration uses target-language characters to represent source-language pronunciation, mainly for proper names (e.g., people, places, brands). In North-China Daily News, examples include "Chang Hsueh-liang" (Zhang Xueliang), "Chen Tu-hsiu" (Chen Duxiu), and place names like "Whangpoo Road" (Huangpu Lu), "Liuho road" (Liuhe Lu). No-associate transliteration reproduces sounds without semantic links (e.g., transliterating names directly). Associative transliteration adds subtle meaning, like "Sprite" becoming "Xuebi", which sounds similar and conveys "freshness" in Chinese. The combination of transliteration method is used when trying to retain the original exotic flavor while also having some semantic indication.

Transliteration is vital for maintaining name/place authenticity in news headlines. For example, "General Chiang Kai-shek" becomes "Jiang Jieshi Jiangjun", ensuring recognition of the historical figure. Shanghai's "Seward Road" is transliterated as "Xi Hua De Lu", preserving pronunciation for Chinese readers. Following established standards is key to avoid confusion—e.g., "Peking" is now commonly "Beijing", reflecting modern phonetic norms.

4.4 Amplification

Amplification in translation adds implicit meaning to clarify headlines, especially for North-China Daily News historical/telegraphic style. For example: "WILKINSON-DALZELL" becomes "Wei'erkinson — Da'erze'er Xi Jie Liang Yuan", adding "xi jie liang yuan" (getting married) based on context. "New orders have been issued by General Ho (Feng-ling)" is translated as "He Fengling Jiangjun Xiada Xin Mingling", spelling out the general's full name in Chinese for clarity. This method ensures that the translated headline is meaningful and complete in the Chinese context.

Amplification is crucial for headlines with abbreviations/acronyms. In North-China Daily News, "S. V. C. INSPECTION" might become "Jianyue Wanguo Shangtuan", adding "Wanguo Shangtuan" to clarify that S.V.C. refers to the Shanghai Volunteer Corps. This explains context for unfamiliar readers to ensure completeness without verbosity [10]. Balance is key: add necessary information—enhance clarity without making headlines verbose.

5. Conclusion

News headline translation is a complex and essential task in the realm of cross-cultural communication and information dissemination. English news headlines, with their unique language features, pose specific challenges and opportunities for translators. Through an in-depth analysis of North-China Daily News, we have explored the various lexical, grammatical, rhetorical, and syntactic features that characterize news headlines.

The lexical features, such as the use of simple and short words, abbreviations, and acronyms, are designed to achieve brevity and quick comprehension. Grammatical features like the use of the present tense for immediacy and non-finite verbs for temporal and action-related expressions add to the distinctiveness of news headlines. Rhetorical devices, including metaphor, pun, and antithesis, make headlines more engaging and meaningful. Syntactic simplification through the omission of functional words helps in creating concise and impactful headlines.

Based on these features, we have proposed several translation strategies, namely literal translation, free translation, transliteration, and amplification. Each strategy has its own applicability depending on the nature of the headline. Literal translation is useful for straightforward headlines, free translation for those with cultural or idiomatic nuances, transliteration for proper names, and amplification for headlines that require additional clarification.

In conclusion, to become proficient in news headline translation, one must not only have a solid grasp of both the source and target languages but also be sensitive to the cultural, historical, and journalistic contexts. By following the principles of "smoothness" and "faithfulness" and enhancing the readability of

the translated headlines, translators can effectively bridge the language gap and enable a wider audience to access and understand the rich world of English news. This paper hopes to serve as a useful reference for English learners and translators, helping them better understand the features of English news headlines and improve their translation skills in this specialized area.

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