Study of Cultural Equivalence in Business English Translation

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Abstract

With China's entry into the World Trade Organization and the strengthening of economic and cultural exchanges between China and other countries around the world, international economic and trade activities are carried out frequently, and the commercial exchanges between China and other countries are increasing. Business English as an indispensable language intermediary in international trade, basic knowledge of business English and international trade has become one of the necessary knowledge reserves for college and university students, and plays a vital role in the success of trade. However, due to the cultural differences between China and the West, and the inherent professionalism, simplicity and completeness of Business English, there are problems of translation accuracy, vocabulary translation accuracy, and sentence translation appropriateness due to cultural differences in the real business English translation. Such problems, whether in the process of translation learning or in the actual practice of business interactions, will cause greater trouble to English majors, affecting the establishment of business relationships and the maintenance of corporate image. This paper tries to summarize the problems in business English translation from the perspective of equivalence theory, and proposes the main methods to solve these problems.

Keywords

Business English; business English translation; cultural differences; equivalence studies.

1. The Current Situation of Cross-cultural Translation in Business English

At the present stage, international business English translation practitioners need to differentiate between their own culture and the cultural differences of other countries when carrying out national culture and business translation work, so as to avoid the differences in the linguistic information embodied by the same linguistic sentence in different cultural contexts, which will result in unequal communication differences. The practical application of business English translation in cross-cultural communication is prone to the problems of cultural value, information loss and distortion in the process of language translation. With the development of economic globalization, business English translation always faces some opportunities and challenges in the process of integrating with cross-cultural communication, for example; due to the cultural limitations of information transmission, there are problems of asymmetric information translation, dead translation, and incorrect information of one's own understanding and so on, which reduces the accuracy of translation.

Cross-cultural communication must foster cultural exchanges and the pursuit of unifying value standards from many perspectives and societal perspectives via business English translation in order to avoid avoidable disputes caused by cultural differences.[1] People's language comprehension in business English translation is frequently affected by cultural differences. For example, when responding to trade inquiries, we frequently say "We are pleased to receive your inquiry about our......" at the beginning to suggest that we have received the inquiry about particular goods graciously, and at the conclusion to convey that we have received the inquiry. Indicating a polite acknowledgement of receipt of an inquiry about a particular good, and often

ends with "Thank you for your interest. We look forward to receiving your order." , indicating that we are glad to receive the inquiry and anticipate getting the other party's order or no order. As a result, business English translation is more than just a language conversion; it is also a crucial tool for communicating across cultures. Business English translators must comprehend the cultural distinctions between Chinese and foreign cultures while acquiring the linguistic abilities of the foreign language and becoming acquainted with the meanings of words in various cultural situations.

2. Relevant Questionnaire Design

2.1. Questionnaire Design

The initial section of the survey asks about the respondents' basic personal details, including their gender, specialization, experience level relevant to the issue, and frequent translation tools. The second part sets 20 questions about the common influencing factors of business translation, which is divided into four dimensions, namely translation methods, cultural traditions, thinking problems and religious beliefs, and each dimension sets 5 questions respectively. Each question item uses a five-point Likert scale, and the five options of the surveyed questions are assigned values from 1 to 5, ranging from "very inconsistent", "not very consistent", "generally consistent", "more consistent", "highly consistent". All scored affirmatively, with the scale indicating the extent of their agreement. Table 1 shows the proportions and meaning of the pieces.

Table 1. Business English Translation Cultural Equivalence Research Scale and Dimensional Questions

Survey Dimension	Cronbach's α	Subject/item
Translator Subject Dimension	0.813	5
Translation Method Dimension	0.852	5
Cultural Tradition Dimension	0.895	5
Dimension of Thinking Problems	0.873	5
Religious Belief Dimension	0.884	5

2.2. Research Objects and Research Methods

In this study, 84 students from two parallel teaching classes in the first semester of the senior year of 2020 at a college in Guangdong area were the subjects of the study. Among them, 42 majors of Business English in the School of Foreign Languages were the experimental observation group and 42 majors of Translation in the School of Foreign Languages were the experimental control group.

The survey was conducted from October 30, 2023 to November 5, 2023 and in the specific test of this study, the researchers asked a total of five sub-questions for each of the five dimensions of the translator's field of expertise, translation methods, cultural traditions, thinking problems and religious beliefs, a total of 25 sub-questions in the testing process. SPSS27.0.1 software was used to conduct data analysis of the results of the two groups of students, and two experimental samples were obtained. After the completion of all specific experimental activities, questionnaires were carried out on the students in the two groups, and data analysis of the questionnaire results was carried out to draw the final experimental conclusions.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics of the interviewed sample

Project	Option	Sample size /number of copies	Proportion / %
Sex	Male	12	14%
	Female	72	86%
Specialty	Business English Class	42	50%
	Translation Class	42	50%
Experience in translation	Translation practice in and out of class only	63	75%
	1-3 months	15	18%
	3-6 months	3	4%
	More than 6 months	3	4%
Familiarity with specific industry sectors	Unfamiliar	81	96%
	Familiar	3	4%
Commonly used tools	English-Chinese-Chinese-English Dictionary	47	56%
	Electronic translation software	76	90%
	Relevant literature and books	29	35%

3. The Problem of Cultural Equivalence in Business English Translation

3.1. Talent development models differ in the importance of oral and written expression

Business English needs to nurture talent with business quality, language expression and communication skills, while translation needs to nurture talent with cultural competence, bilingualism, translation skills and cross-cultural communication skills.[2] When business English majors practice business English translation, students combine business expertise and use more extensive and flexible translation methods and techniques that are not limited to the sequential translation method and the compressed translation method. In business English, oral and written expressions are equally important and require excellent conversation and writing skills, while in translation, written expressions are more important, require good knowledge of grammar and vocabulary, and place more emphasis on the use of language and practicality.

3.2. Translators are not flexible enough to translate business texts

Westerners are representatives of ocean civilization, they are culturally relatively open and free, so when they think about the problem, they tend to consider themselves as the center of the circle to achieve the greatest freedom; While the Chinese people think about the problem, they are not open to the typical riverine civilization and the Confucian thought tradition. Therefore, if students tend to simply adopt the translation method of direct translation for business texts, there is a high probability that the translation result will have large deviations from the original text, thus failing to communicate effectively in business interactions. In addition, the lack of sufficient research on the history and culture of different countries easily leads to inaccurate translations or translation errors. Students' less experience in business English translation for different cultural backgrounds, their lack of understanding of other countries' cultures, and their lack of solid knowledge of different business directions will also limit their business English translation work to a certain extent, resulting in the inability to stimulate their flexible and adaptable abilities.

3.3. Insufficient reading by translators and basic reading practice

Chinese literary scholar Yan Fu previously proposed the translation standard of "faithfulness, expressiveness and elegance".[3] Following this standard, translators should improve their reading and knowledge reserves, read many original works and novels in foreign languages, and even personally experience the lives of Westerners in order to integrate into the desired Western culture, thereby better understanding the cultural difference. But according to this study, only 35% of the students typically consulted books or other pertinent literature while translating, and the great majority of them had little experience translating, with many of them depending more on translation software. As a matter of fact, business English texts and business occasions will be translated with much lower quality if the translator does not read widely and has not acquired enough knowledge.

4. Cultural Equivalence Strategy for Business English Translation

4.1. Improvement of business expertise

Proficiency in translating between English and international business, along with industry knowledge, is a prerequisite for English business translators. So, for English to Chinese business translators, knowing the cultural background is just as important as the translation proficiency. One way to alleviate cultural burden and address the issue of uneven translation information resulting from cultural traditions is through accurate translation of specialized vocabulary. Due to the different cultural backgrounds, there are also large differences in the forms of expression in the individual languages. The translator's task is to minimize these differences in the translation process so that the translated text corresponds to the habits of the Chinese people.[4] Understanding of Western cultural background, familiarity with English expressions and English logic are the professional skills required for business English translation. Only by meeting these requirements can a translator better understand the mindset of the source document during the translation process and improve the accuracy of the translation. In addition, the documents frequently used in business relationships are official documents, such as regulations or mandatory documents. Documents typically have an official style and terminological norms and often use Old English or private terminology. Therefore, translators who translate business English are often suspected of irregularity if they do not understand the characteristics of business English. Therefore, translators should strive to expand their knowledge and improve their business expertise. In other words, business translation is a process of continuous learning, absorption and improvement.

4.2. Improving Business English Translation Literacy

It is important to integrate theory and practical communication in order to improve business English translation literacy. The translation of business English into another language is a dynamic, effective, and very informative process. The application of different business fields is closely linked to the existence of business English translation. That is why the corresponding field translation exists as a medium. At the same time, translators must learn the requirements for business English translation in their respective fields with the help of extensive cultural exchanges and continuously improve their translation literacy for a wide range of understanding. Therefore, with a complete set of systematic theoretical knowledge as a cornerstone, they should actively participate in the process of interpersonal communication in the pursuit of business activities to carry out the pursuit of translation activities, from which they can learn a set of business English translation skills and techniques that are better for the translators themselves are suitable.

4.3. Proficiency and flexibility in the use of translation tools

Through the study of talent training, students can learn translation methods such as direct translation, liberal translation, alienation and naturalization, and translation techniques such as repetition, augmentation, omission, word class conversion, language sequence conversion, split translation, smooth translation, morpheme transfer and combined translation, etc. to utilize translation methods and techniques flexibly in the context and to understand the real meaning of statements and words. Mastering international business English translation skills and emphasize the use of translation methods and techniques is also essential. In recent years, translation theories and techniques are the hotspots of translation research, and it is very necessary and effective for translators to arm themselves with translation theories and techniques.[5] Generally speaking, direct translation is the first method of business English translation, liberal translation is the necessary method of business English translation, and paraphrasing and annotation are the practical methods of business English translation. In addition, improving the reading volume of excellent translations and basic reading exercises is also one of the necessary training methods for translators, and reading large amounts of foreign literature requires a solid basic knowledge of language and writing.

5. Conclusion

Business English plays an important role in the development of international trade and the potential economic benefits it brings are undeniable.[6] Not only as a necessary tool for communication between countries, but also as one of the necessary weapons for the common development of all countries, it occupies a firm place in today's growing economic globalization. Therefore, business English translation is a complex and important task, and its success often depends on the comprehensive influence of several factors. Through a questionnaire survey of college students majoring in Business English, this dissertation discusses in depth the issue of cultural equivalence in business English translation, focusing on five influencing factors such as the subject of the translator, the translation method, traditional culture, the way of thinking, and religious beliefs.

First of all, it becomes clear that the translator's field plays a key role in the translation of business English. The translator's linguistic skills, professional background and knowledge of the target culture directly affect the quality of the translation. Understanding the characteristics of the translation field helps us better understand translation decisions and decisions in a given context. Second, the work focuses on the role of translation methods in cultural equivalence. The choice of translation method affects the way the message is conveyed, and the specialization of the business field places higher demands on the translation method. Through the research, it was found that different translation methods have different effects on dealing with cultural differences in business English translation, which need to be carefully selected in practical use. Thirdly, the influence of traditional culture is also particularly important in translation. Business English involves cross-cultural communication, so an understanding of the traditional culture of the source and target cultures becomes crucial. Studies have found that the skillful use of traditional cultural elements can enhance the accuracy and cultural adaptability of translation. Meanwhile, research on thinking styles reveals that differences in thinking patterns between source and target languages may lead to translation difficulties in business English translation. Understanding and adapting to different ways of thinking is essential to ensure the accuracy and effectiveness of translation. Finally, religious beliefs have also been shown to have an important cultural influence on business English translation. Religious beliefs have a profound influence on the wording and expressions used in certain business scenarios and must be taken into account in the translation process.

To summarize, the quality of business English translation is improved through training and academic exchanges as well as the accumulation of one's own reading to enhance the linguistic ability and professional level of translators. Translation literacy, emphasizing the cultivation of translation literacy so that translators can choose appropriate translation methods in different contexts. Only flexibly using translation means, promoting translators' flexibility in translation, can allow them to flexibly use different translation methods according to specific needs.

Acknowledgments

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