Evaluative Semantics and Attitudinal Positioning in News Translation

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Abstract

This article aims to apply appraisal theory to an analysis of attitudinal positioning in the translation of CNN reports, focusing on attitude and graduation in the translation of soft news and hard news. A case analysis is conducted on sixty news items selected from CNN Interactive English. The findings of this research provide evidence that the intervention of attitudinal positioning in translating evaluative semantics exists both in hard news and soft news but such intervention appears more frequently in the latter. This article argues that the possible reasons for these findings include different readership between the source language and target language communities, the news translator’s stance, and different attitudinal positioning between Chinese and Western media.

Keywords

News translation; intervention; attitudinal positioning, evaluative semantics

摘要

本文旨在应用评价理论中的态度和级差体系，采用定量分析和定性分析相结合的方法，探究国际新闻翻译中态度立场的干预。作者共收集了硬新闻和软新闻共六

http://www.umac.mo/fsh/projections
十则，建立了两个对应的小型语料库。通过统计，我们发现硬新闻和软新闻的译文中都存在对态度立场的干预，而该现象在软新闻中出现的频率更高。研究发现造成干预的原因在于中英读者群、译者立场以及中西方媒体态度立场的差异的影响。

关键词
新闻翻译：不忠实；态度；级差
1. Introduction

Studies of journalistic discourse (such as Martin and White 2005; Bednarek 2006; White 2006) demonstrate that news reports contain rich evaluative meaning. However, despite a large number of studies, little attention has been attached to attitudinal positioning in the translation of journalistic texts. This article argues that appraisal theory provides a new insight in analyzing attitude and stance in the translation of news discourse.

For most citizens, news constitutes one of the most common types of written discourse with which they are confronted most frequently (Van Dijk 1986: 156). It delivers the latest information of a noticeable event and it is often viewed as factual, neutral, and objective. However, apart from verifiable facts, news is also embedded with the correspondent’s attitude, which is often conveyed through the diction of the report. For example, the following two news items demonstrate how attitude can be carried and conveyed in the language used:

1) As human rights protesters shouted outside the White House, inside the gates a big embrace for a relationship both sides said was mutually beneficial.

(CNN, January 18, 2011)

2) 本拉登在巴基斯坦被美军击毙。 (BBC, May 2, 2011)

Osama Bin Laden was shot down by a U.S. operation in Pakistan. (My back translation)

The first example is an English language news item reporting China’s President Hu Jintao’s visit to the United States. Here, “a big embrace” indicates a positive attitude
towards Hu and American President Barack Obama’s meeting. In the second example, to report the death of Osama Bin Laden, the Chinese language news item uses “击毙” (shoot down) which is often used to describe the execution of a major criminal. This word choice shows a negative attitude towards Bin Laden.

Even if the news sources are the same, the news report/item can be strikingly different, signaling diverse attitudes and stances. White claims that, “contrary to any claims to ‘objectivity’ on the part of the media industry, news reporting is a mode of rhetoric in the broadest sense of the word—a value laden, ideologically determined discourse with a clear potential to influence the media audience’s assumptions and beliefs about the way the world is and the way it ought to be” (2006: 37). This potential ideological function of news discourse has been so widely demonstrated in the literature that it hardly needs to be argued for (see, for example, Fairclough 1988; Fowler 1991; White 2000).

According to Bell (1991), news is divided into two broad categories, hard news and soft news. Hard news is the news of the day, which emphasizes immediacy, and mainly covers military affairs, disaster, government announcements, and international events. Soft news, on the contrary, is not necessarily time-sensitive. It focuses on a certain angle and gives an in-depth report, which often includes sports, celebrities, anecdotes, science, and technology.

Many of the processes that occur in the context of news translation in the widest sense have not yet been explored in sufficient depth and are just beginning to attract more attention from translation studies scholars. By nature, news translation is
multidisciplinary, in that it brings different disciplines together such as globalization studies, sociology, international relations, communication, and discourse analysis (Hatim & Mason 1997; Schaffner 2004; Bassnett 2005; Bielsa 2005; Baker 2006; Bielsa and Bassnett 2009). However, little research has been done on the intervention of attitudinal positioning in the translation of news discourse between Chinese and English.

This article analyses attitudinal positioning by examining evaluative resources in the translation of CNN reports, focusing on attitude and graduation, which are two systems in appraisal theory. The objectives of this article are to answer the following questions:

1. Is the translation of evaluative resources in soft news and hard news faithful to the source text?

2. Where do unfaithful translations of evaluative resources most frequently occur?

3. What are the possible reasons for the unfaithful translation?

By addressing these questions, this article contributes to the application of appraisal theory and the study of news translation, and will stimulate further development in this field.

2. Related Concepts in Appraisal Theory

Appraisal Theory was developed by Martin and White (2005) and their colleagues, building upon the interpersonal function within Halliday’s Systemic Functional
Linguistics (SFL), an approach to linguistics that considers language as a social semiotic system. The interpersonal function relates to aspects of a text's interactivity with the reader. Appraisal is “a framework for analyzing evaluation and stance in a text . . . It provides techniques for the systematic analysis of evaluation and stance as they operate in whole texts and in groupings of texts from any register” (White 2002: 1). Thompson believes that “evaluation can be simply defined as the indication of whether the speaker thinks that something (a person, thing, action, event, situation, idea, etc.) is good or bad” (1996: 65). In other words, evaluation is about how a writer/speaker takes either negative or positive views of the participants, actions, happenings, and state-of-affairs. Appraisal can be taken as the linguistic realization of evaluation (Martin and White 2005). The term “appraisal” serves as a general term to cover all evaluative uses of language, including those by which speakers or writers adopt particular value positions or stances and by which they negotiate these stances with either actual or potential respondents (White 2001). In SFL terms, the appraisal system realizes tenor at the level of discourse semantics (Martin and White 2005: 31) and is constituted by three semantic categories: attitude, engagement, and graduation. Attitude and graduation are the focus of this research.

2.1 Attitude

Attitude is concerned with the “values by which speakers pass judgements and associate emotional/affectual responses with participants and processes” (White 2001: 1). Martin and White (2005: 39) take “attitude as in some sense focal” and they

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distinguish “engagement and graduation as distinct resources for adopting a position with respect to proposition and for scaling intensity or degree of investment respectively.” Attitude has three sub-categories: affect, judgement, and appreciation.

Affect characterizes phenomena by reference to emotions such as happiness or unhappiness, satisfaction or dissatisfaction, security or insecurity. Moreover, affect includes not only “authorial AFFECT but also emotional responses attributed to other social actors” (White 2001: 10). Affective positioning often includes positive and negative feelings such as favor or disfavor of something or somebody. Judgement is concerned with resources assessing behavior according to various normative principles. It deals with attitudes towards behavior, which we admire or criticize, praise or condemn (Martin & White 2005: 52). Judgement is subdivided into two broad categories: judgement of social esteem (normality, capacity, tenacity) and judgement of social sanction (veracity, propriety) and these can be positive or negative (speakers/ writers express their admiration or criticism). Appreciation systems include resources used to evaluate the aesthetic quality of processes and products and can also be applied to human beings when they are perceived as entities, and when they are not evaluated in terms of their emotions or behavior. Appreciation has two dimensions: positive and negative, for instance, an interesting story and a boring story demonstrate positive and negative dimension of appreciation. It is organized around three variables: reaction (impact and quality), composition (balance and complexity), and valuation.
2.2 Graduation

Graduation is concerned with the evaluative resources by which the force or intensity of an utterance may be raised or lowered or by which we vary the “focus” or preciseness of the semantic categories we employ in our communications (Martin & White 2005). Graduation operates across two axes of scalability—that of grading according to intensity or amount (force), and that of grading according to prototypicality (focus) and the preciseness by which category boundaries are drawn.

Force covers assessments of degree of intensity and amount. According to Martin and White (2005: 148-149), force can be further divided into intensification and quantification. Intensification operates over qualities (e.g. extremely clever) and processes (e.g. this greatly improves the situation). Assessment of amount applies to entities and is termed “quantification”, which measures imprecise numbers and amounts such as weight, size, distribution or proximity (e.g. a few miles and many miles, small dose and large dose).

Focus covers the meanings that are typically grouped under “hedging” and “vague language.” Such meanings are clearly bound either-or categories that are not scalable from an experiential perspective (e.g. he’s a friend, kind of). Focus works to sharpen and soften such meanings. In other words, it reconstrues meanings in a way that is scalable.
3. Methodology

3.1 Data Collection

This research employs both qualitative and quantitative methods to calculate the distribution of evaluative resources in soft news and hard news respectively. The database includes thirteen issues of *CNN Interactive English* magazine from January 2011 to March 2012. Altogether, I have selected thirty hard news items and thirty soft news items, based on which I have established two corpuses. Detailed data is shown in Table 2.

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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Subject</th>
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<th>Total Number</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Hard News</strong></td>
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<td>Wars/Military</td>
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<td>Politics</td>
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<td>Economy</td>
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<td><strong>Soft News</strong></td>
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<td>Anecdote</td>
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<td>Technology/Science</td>
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Every news item is between 100 and 200 words. After selection, I annotated all news

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items according to the sub-categories (i.e. attitude and graduation) and subsets (i.e. affect, judgement, appreciation, focus deviation, and force deviation). In addition, I marked the translation of the evaluative resources and calculated the frequency and proportion of faithful and unfaithful translation of the evaluative resources.

### 3.2 Appraisal Analysis of the Translation of CNN News reports

Tables 3 and 4 show the numbers of faithful and unfaithful translations of the evaluative resources in hard news and soft news.

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Table 3. Distribution of Faithful and Unfaithful Translation in Hard News</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Hard News</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Attitude</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Total Number</strong></td>
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According to the figures provided in the above tables, both hard and soft news contain abundant evaluative resources, yet, soft news out-numbers hard news in terms of the quantity of items. Over half of the translations of evaluative resources in both soft news and hard news are faithful to the source texts. Table 5 shows the distribution of faithful and unfaithful translation of evaluative resources in hard news, soft news, and both hard news and soft news as a whole.
Table 5. Distribution of Faithful and Unfaithful Translation of Evaluative Resources

The figures above show that more than sixty percent of the translation of evaluative resources is faithful to the source texts, but unfaithfulness appears thirteen percent more frequently in soft news than in hard news, demonstrating that more intervention of attitudinal positioning occurs in soft news than in hard news.

3.3 Case analysis of Hard News

This section discusses the translation of attitudinal resources of hard news with respect to attitude and graduation, using examples of faithful and unfaithful translation. The following four examples demonstrate how evaluative resources are faithfully rendered from source text (ST) into target text (TT).

1. “Middle East Unrest Sends Oil Prices Higher”, Apr. 2011 No.127

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中東動盪 油價持續攀升

ST: The news rattled investors in the U.S. who worry a crisis in Saudi Arabia would cause oil prices to skyrocket and damage the U.S. economic recovery.

TT: 此消息讓美國的投資人大為驚惶，他們擔心如果沙國發生危機，恐將造成油價飆漲，從而拖累美國的經濟復甦。


紐西蘭二十九名礦工全數罹難

ST: New Zealand Prime Minister John Key calls it a national tragedy, and he nearly broke down as he offered comfort to the grieving families.

TT: 紐西蘭總理約翰凱伊說這起事件是國家的慘劇，他在安慰悲傷的家屬時幾乎情緒崩潰。

In example 1, resources of affect and judgement are rendered faithfully from ST to TT. “Rattled” and “worry” show the negative feeling for the high oil price. “Skyrocket” and “damage” describe the quality and effect of a high oil price. Both the ST and TT maintain a negative positioning toward the high oil price. The second news item reports a mine disaster in New Zealand. All attitudinal semantics are faithfully translated in TT. “A national tragedy” describes the quality of the disaster, which belongs to the sub-category of appreciation. “Broke down” and “grieving” reveal the sadness of the Prime Minister and the affected families. Both the ST and TT bear sympathy towards the disaster affected people.
3.3.1 Graduation Difference

1. ST: “Microsoft Bets Big on Skype”, *Jul. 2011 No.130*

   TT: 微軟砸八十五億美元買下Skype

   BT (back translation): Microsoft Throws 8.5 billion Dollars on Skype.

2. ST: “Tunisia Protests Send Ripples through Arab World”

   TT: 北非革命風潮持續延燒，*Mar. 2011 No. 126*

   BT: Revolution in Northern Africa Continues to Escalate

3. ST: “Soldiers Clash on Thai-Cambodian Border”, *Jun. 2011 No. 129*

   TT: 泰柬邊界軍事衝突造成傷亡

   BT: Military Conflict on Thai-Cambodian Border Causes Casualties


   TT: 伊拉克戰爭終落幕，美軍返鄉過節

   ST: Iraq War Finally Ends, U.S. Soldiers Go Home for Festival

All four examples involve graduation difference. In example 1, the focus is sharpened in that “八十五億美元” (8.5 billion dollars) is more precise than “bets big,” which scales up the force of the news that Microsoft has spent a large amount of money buying Skype. In the second example, the focus is softened because “北非” (Northern Africa) represents a bigger scale than “Tunisia.” The translation sends a signal that the whole Arab world is experiencing political disturbance. In example 3, the focus is sharpened and the force scaled up because “soldiers clash” relates the fact that a few soldiers from Thailand and Cambodia are fighting, but “軍事衝突” (military conflict) is much more severe as it indicates that the two armies of the two countries were
firing on each other. The last example involves focus softening, “美軍返籍過節” (U.S. soldiers go home for festival) which draws the audience’s attention to a more humane and caring angle on those involved in the Iraq War and thus may scale down people’s negative feelings about the war.

3.3.2. Attitude Added

The following examples illustrate how affect or appreciation is added in the news headlines:


   TT: 中國渴望紓解南北韓緊張關係

   BT: China is Eager to Release the Tense Relation between North Korea and South Korea


   TT: 冰雪暴狂掃 美東交通大亂

   BT: Fierce Snowstorm Pummeled East America, Causing Traffic Chaos

3. ST: Chinese High-Speed Train Collide, Sep. 2011 No.132

   TT: 中國溫州動車追撞傷亡慘重

   BT: Chinese High-Speed Train Collide, Causing Heavy Casualties


   TT: 臉書首度公開募股備受矚目

   BT: Facebook Attract Great Attention for IPO
In example 1, “中國渴望紓解” (China is eager to release) is added to the translation, indicating China’s active role in solving the highly tense relation between North Korea and South Korea. Both examples 2 and 3 are news about disasters with appreciation added in the Chinese translation, which pinpoints the aftermath of the disasters. Such additions pull the readers closer to the events and encourage them to bear sympathy towards the victims. In the last example, “備受矚目” (attract great attention) is an addition of appreciation, delivering the strong and positive reaction of the audience toward Facebook’s Initial Public Offering and indicating the significant place and promising future of Facebook.

3.4 Case Analysis of Soft News

3.4.1. Faithful Translation

The following two examples are soft news: one is a sports report and the other is an anecdote.

1. “Taiwan’s Yani Tseng Wins LPGA Championship”, Aug. 2011 No.131

ST: One week after Rory McIlroy burst onto the scene by romping to victory in the U.S. Open, another 22-year-old golfer has demonstrated record-breaking greatness. The Taiwanese player Yani Tseng has become the youngest player ever to win four major titles thanks to her 10-stroke victory at the LPGA championship on Sunday. Tseng was simply untouchable at the Locust Hill Country Club, leading from start to finish.
and shooting a final round score of 66 for a winning score of 19 under par.

TT: 麥克羅伊於美國高球公開賽輕鬆獲勝、嶄露頭角，一週之後，另一位二十二歲的高球選手也展現了破紀錄的出色表現。台灣選手曾雅鈴成為史上贏得大賽四座冠軍最年輕的球員，歸功於她在週日LPGA錦標賽領先十桿的勝利。曾雅鈴在盧卡斯山丘鄉村俱樂部球場的表現簡直無人能及，從頭到尾領先，在最後一輪的比賽中打出六十六桿、低於標準桿十九桿的成績獲勝。


寸士寸金的極致空間——東京超迷你屋

ST: Right now, Asia is in our i-List and the third country we’re examining in depth this month, Japan, where there’s a growing trend to make homes more and more compact, some, believe it or not, about the size of a parking space can be used when you’re determined enough. You’ll see in this report from Kyung Lah.

TT: 現在，《走進新國界》來到了亞洲，我們本月要深入探究的第三個國家是日本。日本目前有個愈來愈盛行的趨勢，把住家變得愈來愈小巧扎實。信不信由你，有些住家甚至只有停車位大小。人一旦意志夠堅決，空間利用的效率之高實在讓人吃驚。景物帶來的報導即將讓你眼見為憑。

The first example has both resources of appreciation and judgement. “Youngest” describes Tseng’s quality, which belongs to the subsystem of appreciation. It ranks at

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the highest degree of being young, which foregrounds Tseng’s outstanding performance as the youngest golfer. The news item uses “burst onto the scene” and “romping to victory” to depict Rory McIlroy’s good performance in the U.S. Open, while “record-breaking,” “untouchable,” and “leading from start to finish” portray Tseng’s impressive performance throughout the whole competition as a black horse. Both appreciation and judgement are faithfully translated into the target language in the first news report. In the second example, we can see resources of appreciation such as “growing,” “more and more compact,” and “the size of a parking space,” which present the reader with a trend of building shrinking yet compact homes in Japan. Resources of affect such as “believe it or not” and “determined” attempt to closer the distance between the text and the reader and convince the reader that the phenomenon of Japanese living in small spaces really exists. In the translation of the second news report, semantics of both appreciation and affect are faithfully rendered and hold the same attitudinal positioning as the ST.

3.4.2 Graduation Difference

The following examples present instances of graduation difference:

1. ST: Sydney and Hong Kong Kick Off New Year’s Celebrations, Feb. 2011 No.125

   TT: 各國燦爛煙火爭豔迎新年

   BT: Brilliant fireworks in every country celebrate New Year

2. ST: Royal Couple Sets Wedding Date, Jan. 2011 No.124
TT: 英威廉王子宣佈明年四月完婚

BT: Prince William of Britain sets wedding date in the coming April

In the first example, “Sydney and Hong Kong” is rendered as “各国” (every country) where the focus is softened in that a specific area is replaced with a general and broad one. By softening the focus, the news headline enlarges the scope where people celebrate a New Year coming and amplifies the celebration atmosphere of the New Year. By contrast, in the second example, the focus has sharpened because “英威廉王子” (Prince William of Britain) and “明年四月完婚” (sets wedding date in the coming April) provides precise information of the event, drawing the viewers’ attention to the individual featured and the time frame.

3.4.3 Attitude Added

The following are examples of news items with attitude added:

1. ST: “Taiwan’s Yani Tseng Wins LPGA Championship”, Aug. 2011 No.131
   TT: 曾雅妮LPGA封后 最年輕奪大賽四冠
   BT: Yani Tseng Honored as a Queen in LPGA, the Youngest Quadruple Champion

   TT: 寸土寸金的極致空間——東京超迷你屋
   BT: Extreme Space where an inch of land values an inch of gold, Super Mini Home in Tokyo
3. ST: “Elizabeth Taylor Remembered”, May 2011 No.128

The legendary actress Elizabeth Taylor has died at the age of 79.

TT: “世上最美的女人”伊莉莎白·泰勒一生的傳奇”

傳奇女星伊莉莎白·泰勒已經告別人世，享年七十九歲。

BT: The Life Legend of Elizabeth Taylor, the Most Beautiful Woman in the World

Legendary actress Elizabeth Taylor bids farewell to this world at the age of seventy-years-old.

The above examples observe the addition of judgement, appreciation, or affect. In the first example, “封后” (be honored as a queen) and “最年輕” (the youngest) are added in the Chinese translation, showing the reporter’s admiration and praise for Tseng Yani. The engagement of the translator changes the neutral attitudinal positioning of the ST into a positive one. In the second example, the addition of “寸土寸金” (an inch of land values an inch of gold) sends a signal that one reason for Japanese people seeking to live in such a small space is that housing prices are too high to afford. Meanwhile, the addition also shows the reporter’s surprise about the size of the room. Example 3 sees the addition of both affect and appreciation in the translation. The addition of “世上最美的女人” (the most beautiful woman in the world) and “一生的傳奇” (life legend) reveals the translator’s reverence and admiration for Elizabeth Taylor. “告別人世” (bid farewell to the world) and “享年” (at the age of) not only relates the fact that Elizabeth Taylor has died but also expresses the translator’s overt respect for her.
4. Discussion

In the case analysis provided in this article, I have conducted a contrastive study to analyze the translation of evaluative resources. This section discusses possible reasons for unfaithful translation.

The difference of readership for Chinese and English news partly explains the unfaithfulness in the translation of evaluative resources in both hard news and soft news, especially in news headlines. To attract the reader’s attention, news headlines have to cater to the target reader’s interest by various rhetorical means. Therefore, Chinese news headlines tend to use localized language and incorporate some comment while providing the key information. For example:

1) ST: “Koreas Trade Fire and Threats”, Jan. 2011 No.124

TT: 南北韓交火 朝鮮半島情勢緊張

BT: North and South Korea Trade Fire, Tension over Korea Peninsulas Heightened

2) ST: Chinese High-Speed Train Collide, Sep. 2011 No.132

TT: 中國溫州動車追撞 傷亡慘重

BT: Chinese High-Speed Train Collide, Causing Serious Casualties

The English news headlines report Korean conflict and the collision of Chinese bullet trains. Besides the key information about the events, the Chinese translation adds comments to the news headlines, indicating the reporter’s attitudinal positioning. The addition of “朝鮮半島情勢緊張” (tension over Korea Peninsulas heightened) shows worries about the conflict, while the addition of the consequence of the bullet train...
collision reveals sympathy towards the victims. Although these two events are
different in nature, they relate to the Chinese reader. Chinese readers want to know
more about the events and thus, the translation meets their needs by adding comments
about the events.

The translator’s stance can be another factor leading to the evaluative deviations
in the translation. In this case analysis, I find that target texts and source texts differ
from each other in evaluative resources. According to appraisal theory, writers/
speakers wish to get similar attitudinal responses from the reader/audience. In the
process of decoding the source text, the translator starts as the reader, who
unconsciously becomes involved in evaluating the text and then forms their own
attitudes. Therefore, the translation is likely to be embedded with the translator’s
understanding of the social value and ideology of the source language community. In
the example of Obama declaring the end of the Iraq War, the Chinese translation
positions the reader to blame the United States and sympathize with the soldiers sent
to the battlefield, while CNN news holds a neutral stance.

The different attitudes of the Western and the Chinese media have a significant
influence on the different renderings of the evaluative resources. Ideological
difference often shows itself in the translation of political news reports. For example,
the Tibetan issue remains a sensitive topic between China and the West. The Chinese
media maintains a negative position toward the people or groups who try to seek
independence. On the contrary, many British and French media tend to hold sympathy
towards those people and groups and blame the Chinese government. In the

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translation of English news reports of Tibetan issue, the intervention of attitudinal positioning often occurs where negative words are used to describe the Chinese government or the positive attitude taken by the people or groups seeking independence.

5. Conclusion

To sum up, news translation goes through a complex process including selection, translation, revision, and editing. During this process, the intervention of attitudinal positioning by the news translator consciously or unconsciously occurs due to various reasons. In this article, I have applied appraisal theory to news translation and explored the intervention of attitudinal positioning in the Chinese translation of CNN reports. Through close examination of the translated texts of hard news and soft news, I have attributed the unfaithful translation of appraisal resources to various factors, including the different readership of the source language and target language communities, the news translator’s stance and the different attitudinal positioning between Chinese and Western media. This study further reveals the nature of news translation, which is different from traditional ideas of translation that stress faithfulness and equivalence, in that it places emphasis on target socio-cultural context. Moreover, this study helps to raise the awareness of translators or trainers of news translation to take the influential factors into consideration and to be better prepared for their work.

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