

# A Study on English-to-Chinese Translation Strategies of *Country Driving* from the Perspective of Newmark's Translation

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**Abstract:** *Country Driving* is one of the China trilogy by American writer Peter Hessler. Based on what he saw and heard in his driving around China, he presents with concise language and rich cultural connotations. Its simplified Chinese version was translated by the translator Li Xueshun. Since its publication, it has been well-received by the majority of readers, which proves its literary and documentary value. *Country Driving* is a typical non-fiction literature work. Based on Newmark's theory, this paper will analyze the Chinese translation version of *Country Driving* under the guidance of communicative translation and semantic translation in terms of language structure, rhetoric, culture-loaded words, and special language forms. It is hoped that this paper will enrich the research on the translation of non-fiction Chinese translation literary works and provide some references for future translation practice of documentary literature from the perspective of Newmark's translation theory.

**Keywords:** Peter Newmark; Communicative translation; Semantic translation; Non-fiction literature; *Country Driving*

**Online publication:** June 7, 2024

## 1. Introduction

Due to the rapid development of the world, it is more and more important to record the historical evolution process and promote the translation of non-fiction literature to become more and more prosperous. *Country Driving* is one of the China Trilogy written by American writer Peter Hessler. The book explores China's economy from three roads. First, from the coast of the East China Sea to the west, it is along the Great Wall. Second, the countryside has changed greatly due to the rapid development of China's automobile industry. Third, the life scene witnesses rapid development in a small industrial town in southeast China Town<sup>[1]</sup>. The author roams the Chinese by car and presents his understanding of Chinese society with what he saw and heard during his sojourn. This work is one of the representatives of Chinese non-fiction literature. From the perspective of Newmark's translation theory and the case of *Country Driving*, this paper studies the translation of non-fiction literature, to verify the guiding role of Newmark's translation theory on the translation of non-

fiction literature, to enrich the research on the Chinese translation of non-fiction literature and provide reference for future translation practice of non-fiction literature works under Newmark's translation theory [2].

This paper includes five parts. The first part is an introduction that contains the research background, purpose, and significance. An overview of the Chinese translation of non-fiction literature will be narrated in the second part, including studies on Newmark's translation theory. It can be divided into the origin, contents, research status, and features of Newmark's translation. The third part aims to introduce an overview of the English-to-Chinese translation of non-fiction literature. The fourth part introduces the English-to-Chinese translation of *Country Driving* from the perspective of Newmark's translation theory. The last part is a conclusion referring to the significance of the research [3].

## 2. Framework of Newmark's translation theory

### 2.1. Origin of Newmark's translation theory

Peter Newmark is a famous English translation theorist. He made great contributions to the translation field. For example, in 1988, *A Textbook of Translation* was published. It is recorded that it won the British Applied Linguistics Association Award in the same year. Moreover, in 1991, he published *About Translation*. What's more, in 1981, he put forward two significant translation strategies: semantic translation and communicative translation in *Approach to Translation*, in which he demonstrated different translation approaches should be employed according to different text types. Those related translation methods marked the maturity of his translation theory [4].

Actually, under the influence of Vygotsky, he began to attach importance to the communicative function of language and formed the point of view of communicative translation. In addition, anyone, who thinks most of the time, even when sleeping, let alone when writing, never stops to think. Some texts are more closely related to verbal thinking, and the primary purpose of speech is to communicate. At the same time, the focus of translation should also be on communication. In this case, communicative translation was born.

Subsequently, under the influence of Chomsky, semantic translation was formed. Chomsky was a courageous linguist whose view of semantics and his generative grammar, constantly inspired Newmark's semantic translation. In *Aspects of the Theory of Syntax*, Chomsky proposed that generative grammar should contain three core parts: syntactic, phonological, and semantic [5]. He advocated that the meaning of a sentence is based on the meaning of its basic constituents and how they are combined.

### 2.2. Contents and features of Newmark's translation theory

According to the definition, communicative translation firstly stresses the information transferring of the source text in a way that conforms to the cultural, linguistic, and pragmatic conventions of the target language. Secondly, as part of the meaning, the information should be presented as the original text, which means that the translator needs to work hard to translate the contextual meaning, when using communicative translation, the content and the language ways are easily accepted by the target language readers. In general, the core of communicative translation is to convey a message that is in line with the target language and culture, rather than be a faithful reproduction of the source text [6].

Semantic translation tries to provide an accurate translation that is as faithful to the original as possible within the syntactic and semantic structure of the target language. Semantic translation tends to be source-language-centered, combining the advantages of word-by-word translation, literal translation, and faithful translation when using semantic translation. The translator restricts the content to the scope of the original culture and tries to maintain the author's language features and expression structures. Based on the original text,

it is inclined to place considerable value on the source language to preserve the language characteristics and expressions of the original text. All in all, it can be seen as a translation approach that pays attention to the exact contextual meaning of the source text. As a result, this translation method is generally applicable to non-fiction literary, scientific, and other texts of equal importance in language and content <sup>[7]</sup>.

### **2.3. Differences between the two approaches**

The different emphases are the main distinction between communicative and semantic translation. Communicative translation is functional, while semantic translation is expressive. The former is not limited to the cultural background of the source language, while the latter is grounded on the source language. The nature of communicative translation is to disseminate information so that the translator can shun the reading barriers of the target language readers as much as possible and achieve fluent communication. For semantic translation, the translator only details the meaning of the source text to help readers understand the text. In other words, communicative translation establishes the centric status of the target readers, while semantic translation takes the source language as the center. Communicative translation and semantic translation make their respective advantages complementary to each other. They are nearly interlinked in some aspects, so cannot be divided <sup>[8]</sup>.

### **2.4. Research status of Newmark's translation theory**

Peter Newmark's translation theories are widely used in various pragmatic text translations and are referred to in many master papers.

Jeremy Munday, an English translation theorist, in his book *Introducing Translation Studies*, points out that semantic translation and communicative translation can be analyzed from different parametric perspectives <sup>[9]</sup>. He puts forward that in semantic translation, only when connotative meaning is the main part of the text, the translator needs to help the target readers understand it. In the translation practice, the original text is represented to English readers, while the readers of the translation are Chinese people. Most of them show interest in non-fiction literature. Thus, the translator needs to ensure accurate information during practice <sup>[10]</sup>.

Tan Ran applied Newmark's translation theory to study business cooperation translation. Tian Miaomiao discussed the application of Newmark's theory in the translation of English news headlines into Chinese.

## **3. Overview of English-to-Chinese translation of non-fiction literature**

### **3.1. Contents of non-fiction literature**

Non-fiction literature mainly describes the activities and development of characters and events and vividly reproduces the characters' personalities and the truth of events.

### **3.2. The overview of non-fiction translation**

Firstly, in the light of *The Art of the Fact* by Barbara Lounsberry, a literary critic, said non-fiction is a documentary subject matter chosen from the real world. Secondly, it contains abundant research to give readers a credible reading. Thirdly, the writing of the scene is fundamental to non-fiction work. Because of these characteristics, various translation methods should be employed. According to Newmark, since truth is key to non-fiction, the translator should transform the source text into an approach that can consist of the target text as much as possible <sup>[11]</sup>.

Newmark pointed out that "understanding the original text is the first step in translation, not only to study the text itself but also to reconstruct the translation according to the different needs of readers in different cultures." Therefore, when translating nonfiction literature, it is necessary to accurately and comprehensively dis-

play the original information, and use translation methods such as literal translation.

### **3.3. Research status of non-fictional literature in Chinese translation**

Due to its relatively equivocal identity and insignificant presence as either clearly-defined literature or practical writings, non-fiction literature has had a non-mainstream status, and the translation studies concerning it have been peripheral. Currently, there are few published studies of non-fiction literary English-to-Chinese translation, although more and more foreign non-fiction works have been introduced into China. Only half a dozen relevant theses can be found on CNKI, most of which narrate lessons gained from individual translation practice in a general way rather than having systematic analysis. Among the existing relevant studies, Zeng Zeng from Peking University recommends the strategy of domestication in translating non-fiction in her essay *The Communication from Authenticity to Text*. The study by Xing Lan from Zhejiang University adopts communicative and semantic translation strategies to explore non-fiction works. Li Wenqi thinks that efforts should be made to keep the writer's original style as well. There is no foreign research on non-fictional literature in Chinese translation<sup>[12]</sup>.

## **4. English-to-Chinese translation of *Country Driving* from the perspective of Newmark's translation theory**

### **4.1. Overview of *Country Driving***

#### **4.1.1. Contents and writing features of *Country Driving***

The book explores China's economy with three aspects, namely: from the coast of the East China Sea along the Great Wall to the west, across the 10,000-mile journey in northern China; the countryside facing great changes due to the rapid development of China's automobile industry; life scene of a small industrial town in southeast China.

*Country Driving* was written by Peter Hessler, whose Chinese name is He Wei, former New Yorker China correspondent. That is to say, his ability to grasp the essence of China in the book is inseparable from his life experience. Compared with local Chinese writers, He Wei does not have their preconceived judgments, but based on his own judgments to constantly look for evidence to support his own judgments. Just like painting a portrait of a character, the first general frame of the character should be outlined, and then its details continue to be enriched. This is also a major feature of He Wei's works. His writing is not burdened with heavy ideological baggage, without complex ideological composition. The book not only depicts reality but also provides another new possibility, that is, "Go beyond the limitations of reality and join the writer's unique sense of indifference and introspection." Moreover, in his writing, He Wei inherited the great tradition of the *Travels of Marco Polo*, not taking a moral stance and attaching a personal view to the different cultures in China. His narratives about China often have positive feelings and faithfully restore the facts. "Borrowing from the field of narratology, Peter Hessler's *Country Driving* employs restrictive narratives ways, what he sees and thinks is what he wants to tell us. He even pioneered the use of Chinese traditional painting-style blanks." These are the successes of He Wei's *Country Driving*.

#### **4.1.2. The influence of *Country Driving*'s Chinese version**

The simplified Chinese version of *Country Driving* was translated by translator Li Xueshun. A traditional Chinese translation of the book by translator Lai Fang was published in the Taiwan region by Eight Banners Culture. The simplified version of *Country Driving* has been affirmed by readers since its launch and has been selected as the "Top Ten Best Books for Citizens Reading in the first issue of 2011" organized by Netease and No. 1 in the 2011 Top Ten Best Books in Sina China Best Books List.

Additionally, there is no doubt that *Country Driving* written by He Wei inspires Chinese Non-Fiction writing, and he updates the way people view China, to a large extent among considerable scholars. “For the most part, the cities I saw were really big construction sites. No matter where in China, people are always building, cities are developing, and everything is changing.” “It is not the Great Wall that surrounds China, but piles of scaffolding.” When he returned to Fuling again, the old town had been completely demolished. In *Country Driving*, the rapid changes not only affect the major events such as spatial layout and industrial structure that determine the appearance of the city but also affect the psychological coping mechanism of the Chinese. At the “Chinese Non-Fiction and Non-Fiction of China Forum: Shanghai-Nanjing Twin Cities Literature” held in Nanjing recently, participating writers, scholars, and media people discussed Chinese non-fiction writing. Interestingly, although the famous Chinese non-fiction writer Peter Hessler was not present, the attendees continued to mention his name and the American non-fiction writing represented by him, the poet Mu Ye said people talked about He Wei many times also proves “our own lack of non-fiction writing.”

## **4.2. Analysis of the translation of *Country Driving* from the perspective of Newmark’s Translation Theory**

### **4.2.1. Language structure**

Language structure is the first step to understand the original text in translation, which requires not only studying the text itself but also reconstructing the translation according to the different needs of readers from different cultures <sup>[13]</sup>. There are considerable differences between English and Chinese. English pays attention to form, that is, the language itself is connected by grammar, which is called hypotaxis. While Chinese attaches importance to the meaning, the language is connected by internal logic, and it is viewed as parataxis. English sentences are generally subject-verb structure, and it is compact and rigorous, in which the subject is indispensable.

The structure of Chinese sentences is concise and clear. The subject is often omitted or implied, and auxiliary verbs are often used to express some more complex ideas, that is to say, English is a metaphorical language, emphasizing logical links, and each sentence must satisfy the structure of subject, predicate, and object. It has a phylogenetic structure, so in the original text, each clause has a subject. Chinese is consensual and can be explained step by step in chronological and logical order.

Another notable syntactic contrast is that of the passive voice. It is known that passive voice exists in both English and Chinese. However, the situations of using passive sentences in English and Chinese are not completely consistent. English grammar is very strict, and a sentence must have a subject, but Chinese sentences without a subject are often seen.

### **4.2.2. Rhetoric**

Employing rhetoric devices is one of the pronounced features of the source text. The more rhetorical devices used, the more unique the style of the writer’s work can be reflected. Non-fiction literature, also known as “reportage novels” has the characteristics of documentary and literary works. Rhetorical devices are commonly seen in literary works, including anthropomorphism, metaphor, irony, exaggeration, and so on. These rhetorical means have a vivid image, increasing the ability to express and the sense of rhythm of the characteristics.

In this sentence, the simile is used in the original text, and the translator renders it by retaining the style and structure of the original text, so the translation of this sentence is translated by the semantic translation strategy. On the other hand, the original text has no rhetorical devices, so the translator can add rhetorical devices appropriately.

### 4.2.3. Culture-loaded words

Concerning the definition of culture-loaded words, Palumbo in *Key Terms in Translation Studies* notes that “These are terms or expressions referring to elements or concepts that are closely associated with a certain language and culture and other terms referring to geography, traditions, customs, social organizations, and technologies.” The original text is written in English and describes the current situation of Chinese society. There are both culture-loaded words with Chinese characteristics and a large number of cultural-loaded words with American characteristics. The translation of culture-loaded words directly affects the content of the work.

In English-Chinese translation, amplification is a very commonplace and effective translation method. During the process of translation, the translator should appropriately add some necessary elements and offer sufficient information to make the expression of translation clearer and more vivid.

For example, “reform” refers to “reform and opening up”, a significant change both local and abroad put forward in 1949. If it is translated into “*Gaige*” directly without any explanation, target readers will be confused. Communicative translation is clear in its wording, and it gives the translator a lot of freedom, and the translator can modify the original text.

In this case, the stars and stripes represent the American flag. The flag of the United States of America consists of thirteen broad strips of red and white. Fifty little stars represent fifty states in the United States. The 13 interlocking stripes symbolize the 13 colonies when the United States was first founded. Semantic translation requires that the translated version seeks to preserve the author’s linguistic characteristics and unique expressions.

The text only mentioned the eldest son of the Altan Khan but did not mention his name. The translator added “*Xin Ai Huang Taiji*” to make the meaning of the translation clearer, in line with the target language readers’ cognitive structure and reading expectations.

### 4.2.4. Special language forms

The original text of *Country Driving* is rich in letters, literature, banners, slogans, and other special styles. Translators often use imitation translation to present the content and information of the original text. It embodies the communicative translation function.

The authors have retained the source language features so that the reader can better appreciate the effect of the original text. The example is a slogan on the wall of the hospital, which is simple and clear, preserving the form of the original slogan and making it easy for readers to understand, which also perfectly reflects the role of semantic translation and communicative translation complementing each other in practice

According to the theory of communicative translation, the translated text should be based on the cultural transmission mode of the target language, rather than just copying the original contents.

## 5. Conclusion

The paper researches non-fiction literature based on Newmark’s translation theory. The semantic translation is more objective, focusing on the original text and the original author. Communicative translation is more subjective, and its center is the target language and the target readers. The subject of this paper is *Country Driving*. The book has many features, embracing structure, syntactic, figure of speech, and special forms in the process of writing. As for language structure and rhetoric, translators need to attach importance to using the semantic translation strategy at first, supplementing the communicative translation strategy. Culture-loaded words and special forms require a more communicative translation strategy. Translators can’t apply one way to render the article. According to complex context, translators are required to use communicative and semantic

strategies and try to add words or use annotation at the same time. The true message of the original text can be accurately conveyed to the readers and the translation of non-fiction literature can finally achieve its expected effect.

## Disclosure statement

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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