

# On E-C Political Speech Translation from the Perspective of Newmark's Communicative Translation Theory

-- By Comparing two Chinese versions of Obama's inaugural address

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**Abstract:** According to Newmark's text type translation theory, Obama's presidential election victory speech is a text with expressive function and vocative function, so it should be translated under the guidance of communicative translation strategy. The author believes that when translating political speeches from Chinese into Chinese, translators should be well-versed in the linguistic features and functions of the text, and understand the differences between the cultural backgrounds of Chinese and Western recipients, in order to produce fluent and acceptable translated texts for Chinese readers. By analyzing two translated versions of Obama's inaugural speech, the article elucidates the instructive role of the theory of communicative translation theory in translating Western political speeches into Chinese.

**Keywords:** Newmark, Text Type, Translation of Public Speeches, Style, Communicative Translation.

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## 1. Analysis of Public Speech

### 1.1. Features of Public Speech

Political speeches differ from literature, political texts or law texts. Speeches are characterized with the common and easy language, catchy; clear and lucid structure, compact and well-structured arrangement [1]. They are more formal than daily conversations and spontaneous remarks, conveying a sense of solemnity and reliability. Impressive words, phrases, and sentences are often used to ensure that the audience quickly grasps the speaker's message [2]. In his speeches, Obama did not use elaborate language; instead, he employed simple vocabulary that is easily understood and emotionally engaging.

### 1.2. Functions of Public Speech

Based on Bühler's three major functions of language, Newmark divides discourse into texts with expressive functions, informative functions, and vocative functions. He points out that expressive texts include imaginative literary works such as poems, novels, dramas and authoritative statements, speeches, declarations, autobiographies, essays and private correspondence. These texts tend to focus on the original author, source language, and source culture, emphasizing semantic translation. Informative texts, on the other hand, include journalism, scientific papers, general textbooks, etc., which emphasize the role of information dissemination. Vocative texts include advertisements, political pamphlets, popular literature, announcements, and manuals, emphasizing the effects on the readers, thus these two types of texts should focus on communicative translation. Public speech has expressive and vocative functions in the source text [3]. In this speech, Obama aims to announce his policy agenda, express his political views and positions, arouse enthusiasm among the audience, persuade them to accept his political propositions, and attempt to awaken a

sense of responsibility in everyone while building confidence in the new president. The original text places more emphasis on the communicative effect, so the translator needs to take this into account.

## 2. Overview of Newmark's Communicative Translation Theory

The introduction of semantic translation and communicative translation stands as a significant theoretical contribution by the distinguished renowned British translation theorist Peter Newmark in his book *Approaches to Translation*. Semantic translation places considerable emphasis on the author's thinking process. Therefore, during the translation process, it focuses on the source language bias and endeavors to convey the contextual meaning of the original text within the semantic and syntactic structures permissible in the target language. Semantic translation typically operates at a finer unit level, allowing the translated text to better keep the original language characteristics and expression style, restoring the original text's rhetorical and other forms. On the other hand, communicative translation stresses that the effect of the translation on the target language readers should mirror the effect of the original text on the source language readers. This approach places more emphasis on the target language biased and the transmission of information, prioritizing meaning over form [4]. Upon analysis, the authors believe that semantic translation is ideal for translating informative texts and other relatively objective texts, while communicative translation is more suitable for translating vocative texts, facilitating a more effective conveyance of meaning and evoking public sentiment.

### 3. Criticism and Appreciation of Two Translations from the Perspective of Communicative Translation Theory

From the perspective of Newmark's Communicative Translation Theory, the author will criticize and analyze two authoritative translations of Obama's Victory Speech on November 4, 2008 (A is translated by New Oriental and B is translated by Reference News).

Example 1:

ST: It's the answer spoken by young and old, rich and poor, Democrat and Republican, black, white, Latino, Asian, Native American, gay, straight, disabled and not disabled - Americans who sent a message to the world that we have never been a collection of individualism or a collection of Red States and Blue States

A: 这是所有美国人民共同给出的答案——无论老少贫富, 无论是民主党还是共和党, 无论是黑人、白人、拉美裔、亚裔、原住民, 是同性恋者还是异性恋者、残疾人还是健全人——我们从来不是“红州”和“蓝州”的对立阵营, 我们是美利坚合众国这个整体, 永远都是。

B: 这个答案来自青年人和老年人, 富人和穷人, 民主党和共和党人, 黑人和白人, 拉美裔、亚裔和美国原住民, 同性恋和异性恋, 残障人士和健全人士。美国任向世界宣告, 我们绝不仅仅是一群个体或一群红州和蓝州。

Analysis:

In the original text, red states and blue states represent corresponding political parties, but Chinese readers unfamiliar with American culture may mistake them for company names or organizational titles. In terms of discourse information, information can be categorized into explicit information and implicit information. Explicit information refers to the literal meaning, while implicit information denotes deeper meanings or extra-linguistic meaning, which is part of the meaning that the original author intended to convey and thought could be comprehended. Implicit information is also what the original author believes the target language readers have already known or should understand [5]. Therefore, the translator supplements relevant background information. Given the differences in political systems between China and the United States, a literal translation will lead to reading barriers for the target readers. To ensure that the target readers and the original readers share the identical comprehension and sentiments, the translator should supplement relevant cultural context, minimizing the foreignness of translated texts. The author believes that the translators should adopt the translation strategy of amplification by adding "Republican" before "Red State" and "Democrat" before "Lanzhou", as neither of the two texts mentioned above adds relevant information and adopts a semantic translation.

Example 2:

She was there for the buses in Montgomery, the hoses in Birmingham, a bridge in Selma, and a preacher from Atlanta who told a people that "We Shall Overcome." Yes we can.

A: 她看到蒙哥马利通了公共汽车、伯明翰接上了水管、塞尔马建了桥。

B: 她见证了蒙哥马利的抵制公共汽车运动 (1955年, 马丁·路德·金在蒙哥马利领导了抵制公共汽车运动——译者注), 伯明翰的黑人示威 (1963年, 马丁·路德·金在伯明翰领导了黑人示威运动, 与装备消防水枪的警察发生冲突——译者注) 塞尔马的血腥星期天 (1965年3月7

日, 塞尔马的黑人不满政府无理剥夺他们的投票权, 决定游行到州首府蒙哥马利, 在经过埃孟德佩图斯桥时, 警察向游行队伍施放催泪弹, 用木棍殴打游行人士, 结果造成100人浴血的埃孟德佩图斯桥惨剧, 史称“血腥星期天”——译者注)。

Analysis:

This statement sounds like three ordinary trifles, but Obama is conveying to America and the world how his feelings as the first black president of the United States. He is recounting the painful experience of discrimination endured by black Americans in the United States over the centuries, encapsulating the bitter history of black people that is familiar to every American. The three stories include black individuals being forced to give up their seats to white individuals on buses, police using hoses to suppress protests, and a tragic incident on a bridge during a protest.

Translation B provides a detailed explanation of the events, but translation A fails to elaborate, instead remaining literal. Translation A assumes that the textual references are known to the target readers and therefore does not provide further details. When the original reader and the target reader do not have an equal level of a previous knowledge about the things and phenomena being referred, then the realization of the function fails. Translation A lacks sufficient cultural knowledge, leading to the failure of the translated text in terms of informative and vocative functions. Therefore, translation B is more appropriate.

### 4. Conclusion

With the acceleration of globalization, cultural, political and economic exchanges between countries are increasingly intense. Political speeches have emerged as one of the most significant means of political exchanges among countries. Political speeches concentrate on the understanding and response of readers or listeners, not only focusing on information transmission, but also realizing the communicative effects. Newmark's theory of communicative translation values information transmission and the realization of communicative effects, without necessarily adhering to the semantics and syntactic structure of the original text. The goal is to reproduce as far as possible the same effect felt by readers of the original text in the target language.

Under the auspices of Newmark's theory of communicative translation, translators are mandated to actualize the informative, emotional and vocative functions of the original text, taking into account the anticipated communicative effects of the translated text, the cultural disparities between eastern and western readers, and integrating text types and stylistic attributes.

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