Study on Translation Principles and Strategies of Naval Terminology

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Abstract. Based on the analysis of the structure, semantic and usage features of naval terminology, this paper discusses the common problems of translating naval terms and explores the translation principles and strategies in order to provide reference and assistance for improving the translation quality of military terminology and effectively reducing translation errors.

Keywords: Naval terminology; translation principles; translation strategies.

1. Introduction

The Military Terminology of Chinese People’s Liberation Army in the 2011 edition defines “military terminology” as “short terms for military language”, and “it is the normalized military terms used by the armed forces in military operations, training and other operations and also the standardized phrases for organizing various military activities, standardizing the organizational structure of armed forces, expressing the names and functions of various weapons, equipment and facilities, and writing various military documents.” [1] As an important branch of military terminology, naval terminology is the word forms used to express specific military concepts and military knowledge in the naval vocational field. Therefore, naval terms have their unique language characteristics in use and cannot be translated in terms of the translation principles and methods of common words, and their particularity should be understood and mastered.

2. Connotation of Naval Terminology

Terminology is defined as “specialized terms used in various disciplines”, and “the meaning of the terms should follow strict regulations.” For example, computer terminology has “background” and “platform”, and “trill” and “concerto” in musical terminology. In Webster’s dictionary, the definition of the word “terminology” refers to “a word or expression that has a precise meaning in some uses or is peculiar to a science, art, profession, or subject”. Based on this definition, we find that terminology is closely related to the disciplines and professions, and is the link between professional knowledge and communication. Thus, from the perspective of linguistics, the word “terminology” can be defined as “a form of word that expresses a certain scientific concept within a specific field.” [2]

As an important branch of military terminology, naval terminology has common characteristics of military language, that is, it is professional, scientific, universal, systematic, and monosemic. Meanwhile, naval terminology is typical of English for Navy and emphasizes the professional communicative ability. Therefore, naval terminology, in this research, can be explained as the words and expressions expressing specific concepts and knowledge of Navy.

3. Linguistic Features of Naval Terminology

The naval terms mainly stem from three parts: firstly, specialized English terms and expressions for Navy, which express Navy concepts and knowledge, such as submarine, superstructure, torpedo tube, etc.; secondly, common English words and expressions with military meanings, such as forces (groups of soldiers or military vehicles that are organized for a particular purpose), operations (military activities), formation (a particular arrangement or pattern in flight or troops),
etc.; thirdly, common academic words and expressions from meteorology, hydrology, surveying and mapping and other fields, which do not carry the obvious denotations from Navy, but can be used both for military and civilian purposes.

3.1 Structure Features

3.1.1 Abbreviation

Abbreviations are one of the most important shortened and concentrated word forms of naval terms. The wide application of naval abbreviations conforms to the economy principle of language, which reduces the length of original language units and elaborates complex meanings with simplified expressions so as to realize the convenience and fluency of communication. For example, the full form of HMS is Her/His Majesty’s Ship, and Mine Countermeasures Vessel can be used in a shortened form—MCMV. Abbreviations are more economical in both word spelling or reading.

3.1.2 Chunk

There are a large proportion of “lexical chunks” in naval terminology. The naval “lexical chunks” are usually in the form of compound words with relatively fixed meaning and structure. The common compound word structures involve the following four patterns: “noun + noun” (such as accommodation ladder, anchorage position, control ship), “adjective + noun” (such as defensive campaign, magnetic mine, grey water, designated anchorage, classified compartment, combined exercise), “particle + noun” (such as heaving line, following sea, firing area), and “noun + prepositional phrases” (such as at-sea serials, bridge-to-bridge communications, close-in weapon system, formation in open order). The professional knowledge of Navy could be more accurately acquired with the help of naval “lexical chunks”.

3.2 Semantic Features

3.2.1 Unity

The unity of naval terminology is mainly reflected by its single semantic connotation, that is, the vast majority of naval terms refer to a certain military concept and knowledge in a certain naval vocational field. For instance, line guide, mine hunting, lateral replenishment, and etc. The unity of naval terminology can not only determine the specific context, but also ensure the correct use of naval English terms.

3.2.2 Accuracy

The accuracy of naval terminology is mainly based on its particularity and irrereplaceability different from daily English words. For example, the wheel order and engine order are filled with naval terms, like“Nothing to port!”;“Emergency full ahead!”etc. In addition, some weapon and equipment vocabularies are typical of naval terms, such as “radar reflector”, “destroyer”, “missile launcher” and so on. These terms cannot be replaced by common English words and expressions. The accuracy also shows the requirements of military terminology, that is, “military terminology requires standardization, and the terms’ meaning must be definite and unified.”[3]

3.3 Usage Features

3.3.1 Normalization

Many special military occasions, such as drawing up battle plans or issuing battle commands during joint exercises, demand a normalized usage of English for Navy. Therefore, the normalization of naval terminology is an effective guarantee and necessary condition for naval forces operations, which needs to be continuously coordinated, standardized and unified in practice.

3.3.2 Simplicity

The simplicity of naval terminology use mainly results from a large number of abbreviations. In order to accurately express Navy concepts and knowledge in a simplified and correct way, the
abbreviations of naval terminology realize the pertinence and economization of language use in both written and spoken English.

4. Translation Problems of Naval Terminology

4.1 Lacking Understanding

Naval terminology involves a large proportion of abbreviations, most of which are monosemic, but there are still some polysemous words. For example, MCS can refer to machinery control system or mine countermeasure ship. Thus, the naval terms, especially the abbreviations, should be translated with context, screening and identification in order to avoid arbitrary judgement.

Moreover, since the monosemy of naval terminology, translators often translate the naval terms word by word, which will cause omitting, adding and arbitrarily altering the content of original text. For instance, Blue-water capability means that a fleet is able to operate on the high seas far from its home base. 远海作战能力是指舰队可以在远离基地的公海进行作战。The concepts of “combat” and “far sea” are often ignored, and “blue-water capability” is possibly translated as “远海能力”.

4.2 Ignoring “small context”

There are a large number of chunks in form of compound words with relatively fixed meaning and structure. The “chunk” terms, usually composed of 2-5 words, create the “small context” making their meaning clear. For example, “Officer of the Deck” should be translated as “值更官” instead of “甲板军官”, “on station” is “在战位上” rather than “在车站”, “Rules of the Road” is not “道路规则” but “航行规则”, and “secretary of the Navy” refers to “海军部长” rather than “海军秘书”.

4.3 Section Headings

The particularity of naval terminology is also lies in its possession of a good many “jargons”, which makes the laymen unable to translate the naval terms effectively and accurately, due to the lack of practical work background and experience. For example, "Hit the rack" should be translated as “离开去休息” rather than “击打支架”, and “dead in the water” should be referred as “舰船在水中静止不动” rather than “死在水中”.

5. Translation Principles and Strategies of Naval Terminology

5.1 Translation Principles of Naval Terminology

5.1.1 Principle of accuracy

The connotation of naval terminology is closely related to the Navy concepts and knowledge, and most of naval terms are highly directional and typical of monosemy. Therefore, the connotation and denotation of naval terms are confines to some vocational fields, and one concept can be expressed in a specific time and space, while another time and space will generate completely different connotations. For instance, “compartment” means “舱室” as a naval term, but “火车车厢” in daily English.

5.1.2 Principle of normalization

The acquisition and exchange of the Navy concepts and knowledge requires unified and standardized naval terms so as to facilitate the joint, order, communications and coordination of armed forces. It is not recommended to use synonyms or alternatives, much less to ungrounded translation. For example, “aft steering” refers to “艉舵操舵”, “amphibious squadron” is “两栖中
5.1.3 Principle of simplicity

The abbreviations of naval terminology have a high-density use, a huge range of contraction and a good concealment, and the new abbreviations are coined quickly, which requires translators to translate the long and complex terms and abbreviations in a clear and concise way instead of interpretive translation. For example, “SAREX (Search and rescue exercise)” is translated as “搜救演练”, and “SEAL (sea-air-land team)” refers to “海豹突击队”. Such terms can be remembered and recited easily through vivid and descriptive meanings.

5.2 Translation Strategies of Naval Terminology

5.2.1 Literal translation

The monosemy and unity of naval terminology requests translators to be faithful to the original texts, and the translation needs to be understood and remembered easily, which will facilitate international exchanges and cooperation. The word order of naval terms is usually the same as that of Chinese terms, so that the naval terms can be translated in turn according to the word order. For example: “ballistic missile” can be translated as “弹道导弹”, “ballistic missile submarine” is “弹道导弹潜艇”.

5.2.2 Free translation

Naval terminology contains some common words in both military and civilian use, which requires translators to keep the deep meaning of original texts rather than the literal meaning in translation, and to change the expression form of the original texts through the specific contexts. For example, in the following dialog - Torpedoes! (鱼雷袭击!) — Sound general quarters! (进入一级战斗准备!)

5.2.3 Interpretive translation

Some naval terms are filled with rich naval historical and cultural background, so it is necessary to express the terms in an interpretive way. For example: "Bloggins can't leave the ship, he's got stoppers!" should be translated as “水兵们不能离舰，禁假了！”

6. Summary

To improve the translation quality of naval terms, translators should not only know, acquire and summarize relevant translation principles and strategies, but also learn abundant Navy knowledge and master the general professional terms, so as to improve the translation quality of military articles in the naval vocational field.

References