

# A Study on C-E Translation of Nominalization in News Discourse from Grammatical Metaphor Perspective

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Nominalization, as the main means of reaching grammatical metaphor, is one of the distinctive features of written corpora and plays an important role in the discourse construction of news discourse. Based on the theory of grammatical metaphor, this article discusses the phenomenon of nominalization and its translation strategies in news discourse by analyzing translation examples. It is found that nominalization structure can effectively enhance the informativeness and objectivity of news discourse. When translating from Chinese to English, the translator should take into full consideration of the different characteristics of the two languages, and convert the predicates, subject-predicate structures, verb-object structures and clauses into nominalization structures. Through this translation strategy, the translation will be more in line with the English language characteristics and usage habits, and can accurately convey the information of the original text, finally realizing the effective translation of the language.

**Keywords:** grammatical metaphor, news discourse, nominalization, Chinese-English translation

## Introduction

Nominalization is a prominent phenomenon in written language. The linguistic study of nominalization can date back to *The Philosophy of Grammar* by Jespersen published in 1924. Since then, it has attracted the interest of linguists from different schools. Structuralistic linguistics, TG linguistics, systemic-functional linguistics and cognitive linguistics have approached the issue from different perspectives, and many perspicacious views have been proposed. Nowadays, with the development of technology, mass media have gradually become one of the primary ways for information attainment. As the discourse used in news report by mass media such as newspapers, magazines, and radio stations, news discourse is noted for its high degree of nominalization. According to Wang (2003), the frequency of nominalization in news discourse is second to scientific texts and third to legal ones.

Therefore, this paper will analyze the phenomenon of translating different types of words in Chinese news discourse into nouns in English based on the theory of grammatical metaphor in Systemic-Functional Linguistics, and the example sentences selected in the article are all from the bilingual news of *China Daily* from 2023 to 2024.

## **Grammatical Metaphor and Nominalization**

Grammatical metaphor was first proposed by M.A.K. Halliday in 1983 and later developed by himself. In the last chapter of *An Introduction to Functional Grammar*, Halliday (2012) holds that metaphor exists in grammatical level but not only in lexis: hence the term grammatical metaphor. According to him, grammatical metaphor includes ideational metaphor, interpersonal metaphor and textual metaphor.

The ideational metaphor refers to the untypical representations of experiences in reality. It involves the transference between material, mental, relational, existential, verbal and behavioral processes which reflect what is seen, read and done in reality. It also involves shifts of roles and functions of some syntactic elements, and part of speech changes of some words. As nominalization can make a word move down from a clause into a noun phrase in rank, it becomes the main source of ideational metaphor.

According to Halliday (1994), there are three strata in the system of language, namely phonology, lexicogrammar and discourse semantics. The phonology stratum is a realization of the lexicogrammar, which in turn is a realization of the discourse semantics. There are two forms of realization: (1) congruent form, i.e., unmarked form; (2) incongruent form, i.e., marked form. In other words, a metaphorical form must be contrasted with a non-metaphorical form, and this non-metaphorical form, is congruence. In the process of converting from congruent form to incongruent form, nominalization becomes the natural choice because it is the main means to release the pressure of semantic potential (Xu, 2009). We can make them have extraordinary semantic potential by bringing a varying number of modifiers, qualifiers and other adjuncts. Halliday argues that nominalization is a kind of grammatical metaphor, the use of a nominal form to express a process meaning (congruently worded as verbs) or a property meaning (congruently worded as adjectives). That is to say, by nominalizing, “processes and properties are reworded metaphorically as nouns, instead of functioning in the clause, as Process or Attribute, they function as Thing in the nominal group” (Halliday, 1994, p. 352). He defines nominalization from a functional perspective based on a view of how language functions as a system of human communication. By classifying technological discourse, Halliday (1996) summarized 13 types of conceptual metaphors, among which, five types belong to nominalization: (1) nominalization of quality; (2) nominalization of process; (3) nominalization of circumstance; (4) nominalization of relator; and (5) from null to lexically empty nouns.

When comes to its functions, as one of the typical textual features of news discourse, nominalization can convert verbs and adjectives into noun structure, forming a cross-coupling between semantic, lexical and grammatical strata. In news discourse, the flexible use of nominalization structure can lead to clear and concise language expression, natural and coherent discourse organization, and objective literary style.

## **The Use of English Nominalized Structures in Chinese-English Translation**

Chinese to English translation should make full use of English nominalized structures, not that all Chinese words, structures and sentences can be transformed into nominalized structures in Chinese to English translation. According to Peng (2009), the main cases that are eligible to be transformed into English nominalized structures are as follows: predicate nominalization, subject-predicate structure nominalization, verb-object structure nominalization, and clauses compressed into English nominalized structures. Through this

translation strategy, the translated expression is more in line with the linguistic characteristics and usage habits of English, and can accurately convey the information of the original text.

### **Predicate Nominalization**

Chinese as a dynamic language relies more on verbs. English, on the other hand, makes more use of nouns. Therefore, verbs and adjectives used as predicates in Chinese are often transformed into English nominalized structures in written corpora.

Verb-predicate statements are transformed into English nominalized structures. For example:

#### **Example (1)**

盛蕾称，常州2024年经济社会发展的主要预期目标是地区生产总值增长6%以上，将从产业集群发展、创新驱动发展、绿色低碳发展等方面狠抓落实。(2024-1-26)

She said Changzhou has set its 2024 GDP growth target of over 6 percent, with focus on the development of industrial clusters, innovation, and green and low-carbon transition.

In Example (1), “狠抓落实” is used as a predicate, and the translation transforms it into the noun phrase “focus on”. The main message of the Chinese sentence is at the end of the sentence, which is the center of the sentence, while the main message of the English sentence is often placed at the beginning of the sentence. Nominalization of Chinese predicates in English translation not only makes the style more correct, but also restructures the language. It can also reorganize the center of the sentence and highlight the information contained in the predicate.

Adjective predicates in Chinese can also be converted into expressions that meet the characteristics of the English language by nominalization metaphors when translating from Chinese to English, thus promoting the improvement of the quality of the translation. For example:

#### **Example (2)**

春节前，年轻人排队打金场面堪比参餐馆等位。临近春节，曾经的“打金热潮”又回来了。不少年轻人跟上潮流，打出新花样：泥鳅背、小猫爪、龙鳞纹……不少人认为，自己打出的首饰好看又实惠而且比机器更温情。(2024-2-11)

As the Chinese New Year draws near, the “gold rush” phenomenon resurfaces. Many young people are following this trend by crafting their own gold jewelry. They believe that their handmade pieces are not only aesthetically pleasing and affordable but also imbued with a warmth that machine-made jewelry lacks.

In Example (2), “温情” as an adjectival predicate is transformed into a noun “warmth” in the process of translation. On the one hand, “imbued with a warmth that machine-made jewelry lacks” makes the discourse expression more formal and conforms to the discourse characteristics of news, and at the same time, it makes the textual information more focused and emphasizes the warmth of handmade pieces as opposed to machine-made ones.

### **Nominalization of Subject-predicate Structures**

Subject-predicate structures in Chinese can be used as either the subject or object of a sentence, as well as acting as predicates and many other components, with an endocentric nature centered on predicates (Yao &

Dong, 1997). These subject-predicate phrases can be converted into English nominalized structures when they are translated into English, making the translated expressions more concise and authentic. For example:

Example (3)

上海申浩律师事务所张玉霞律师认为，“租人”服务作为一种劳动雇佣关系应受到民事法律规范。然而，缺乏书面协议可能会对人身安全构成威胁，并可能发生卖淫等非法活动。(2024-1-29)

However, the lack of written agreements may pose threats to personal security, and illegal activities such as prostitution could occur.

Chinese focuses more on semantic coherence. In Example (3), the logical subject of the verb “构成威胁” is “缺乏书面协议”. And in the process of translation, in accordance with the English focus on formal adhesion and the expressive habit of basically using one predicate verb in a sentence, the structure “缺乏书面协议” is translated into an English nominalized structure as the subject, which increases the formality of the discourse, and, at the same time, the actor of the act is hidden, making the text more concise and objective.

Regarding the subject-predicate structure can also be used as a determiner for subjects and objects, predicative, and adverbial, we will give an example of a subject-predicate structure acting as a determiner in an adverbial to illustrate. For example:

Example (4)

据文化和旅游部1月1日发布的数据，元旦假期3天，全国国内旅游出游人次同比增长155.3%，较2019年（新冠疫情冲击旅游业之前）同期增长9.4%。(2024-1-2)

Domestic destinations welcomed a staggering 155.3-percent surge compared to the same period last year, the Ministry of Culture and Tourism said on Monday. This figure even marks a 9.4 percent increase compared to 2019, before the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted travel.

In Example (4), “全国国内旅游出游人次同比增长155.3%” is a subject-predicate structure, which can be translated from Chinese to English using the normal order of speech. For example: Domestic destinations have increased 155.3-percent surge compared to the same period last year, but if this subject-predicate structure is encapsulated into a nominalized structure, the line would be more concise, the language style would be more formal, more in line with the expression habits of news discourse.

### Nominalization of Verb-object Constructions

The verb-object phrase, formed by the combination of the verb and the following constituent governed by the verb, the constituent governed by the verb is the object. The first component of the phrase is filled by the verb and plays a dominant role; the second component is governed by the verb and indicates the person or thing involved in the action behavior, which is often filled by nouns, pronouns, etc. and called object. The verb-object phrase is used very frequently in Chinese, and the relationship between the object and the verb is varied. It can be used as the subject, object, determiner and other components in a sentence, and it can also be transformed into a noun phrase when translated from Chinese to English.

**Example (5)**

英文文学季刊《巴黎评论》由美国作家乔治·普林顿、彼得·马修森等人于1953年创刊于法国巴黎，后编辑部迁至美国纽约，并持续出版至今。(2023-12-12)

The Paris Review, initially founded in Paris in 1953 by George Plimpton, Peter Matthiessen, and others, is a quarterly English-language literary magazine. Later, its editorial office relocated to New York City, USA, and has maintained uninterrupted publication since.

“持续出版” is a verb-object phrase consisting of two verbs, which can be transformed into an English sentence by using a nominalized structure when translating from Chinese to English. In addition, the phrase can also be translated directly and sequentially as keep publishing. Which structure is better? Grammatically, there is no difference between these two expressions, but as a news discourse, the nominalization structure is more in line with the English expression habit.

**Sentences Become Nominalized Structure**

Chinese sentences are flexible and changeable, focusing on the expression of linguistic meaning, and the sentence structure is relatively loose. English pays more attention to the form of language, the overall sentence structure is rigorous, and more compound long sentences. When translating, the short sentences or clauses in Chinese can be packed and compressed into a nominalized structure to act as a component of another sentence, so as to enhance the conciseness of the discourse and increase the amount of effective information.

**Example (6)**

中国国家统计局1月27日公布的数据显示，12月份，中国全国规模以上工业企业（年主营业务收入在2000万元以上的工业企业）利润总额同比增长16.8%，11月同比增长29.5%。(2024-1-28)

Data from the National Bureau of Statistics showed on Saturday that industrial enterprises with annual revenue of at least 20 million yuan (\$2.8 million) saw their total profits increase 16.8 percent year-on-year in December after a 29.5 percent rise in November.

In Example (6), the last clause of the original text is transformed into a noun structure “a 29.5 percent rise in November”, and is linked to the main clause by the preposition after. Clauses in Chinese are packed into noun phrases in the translation, and the text is concise and condensed, with a high degree of information density.

**Conclusion**

Based on the theory of grammatical metaphor, the article explores the function of nominalized structure in news discourse and discusses the translation method of news discourse with examples. Through analysis, it is found that nominalized structure combines the characteristics of nouns and verbs or adjectives, which can effectively enhance the conciseness, coherence, objectivity and formality of the discourse. In the process of translating news texts, translators should take into full consideration the typical features of the two languages at different lexical and grammatical levels, and convert Chinese verbs, subject-predicate phrases, verb-object phrases and sentences into nominalized structures, so as to make the translations more truthful and accurate, and the construction of the discourse more appropriate and natural. The proper use of English nominalization phenomenon in Chinese-English translation can not only improve the quality of translation. It is more

conducive to the English-speaking people's understanding of Chinese culture. Today, as China is increasingly moving towards the world, we should constantly study the specific problems in Chinese-to-English translation and make more contributions to Chinese-to-English translation to build a bridge to introduce China to the world.

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