

商务英语的翻译原则

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[摘要]自从改革开放以来,中国的经济在世界上创造了一个又一个奇迹。中国的国际贸易正以惊人的速度增长,因此,国际商务交流就显得异常重要。英语作为一种主要的交流工具,如何更好地为中国的对外贸易服务成为了英语专业人才必须面对的艰巨任务。本文将主要阐述商务英语的翻译原则。

[关键词]商务英语 翻译原则

1. What is Business English

Business English is a special term given to English by non-English speaking nations for international trade. It is usually called Business English, Business English Correspondence or Business Letter in the USA. In Britain, it is often called Commercial English or Commercial Correspondence or Commercial Letter.

Business English refers to the English used in business correspondence and activities. To give it a more detailed definition, Business English includes Ordinary Business English and Specialized Business English.

2. Function of Business English

The most important function of Business English is its vital role in communication. In business activities, we need to make known the information of the goods including name, price, quality, quantity and so on. Both parties in a business activity need to establish trading relations first and make detailed agreement on many trading terms. All these need to be achieved by mutual communication.

3. Translation of Business English

Principles in Translating Business English

Many principles of translation have been discussed mainly in literary translation. However, a translation version that meets the requirement of literary translation may not be a satisfying one in Business English translation. For example,

建筑设备按机械临时进口条件运入订货方国家。

English version 1:

Building equipment and mechanical facilities will be transported into the ordering country under the condition of temporary improvement.

English version 2:

Constructional equipment and machines are imported to the Customer's country on a re-exportation basis.

According to common translation principles, version 1 contains all the information of the original version and the expression is quite clear. However, it would be strange for professional business people. The two terms "ordering country" and "temporary importation" are not standard translation of the corresponding words in Business English. Thus version 2 is a professional version.

The failure in achieving a professional and successful Business English translation may be due to the skill of the translator or the limit of target language. However, the most important reason might be the lack of business knowledge, which leads to the word-to-word translation with vague meaning.

In Business English translation, a translator should abide by the following principles.

3.1 The Most Vital Principle—Faithfulness

Everyone knows that legal translation leaves little room for adaptation and rewriting. In a number of cases, the translator may not achieve "faithfulness", "expressiveness" or "elegance" at the same time. Then we should put "faithfulness" in the most vital position. Faithfulness in translating Business English means to correctly translate the information in source language into target language. It does not require the exact formal conformity with original version, but the exact convert of information.

Let's take the following example.

Chinese version:

客商从开发区企业分得的利润汇出境外时,免征所得税。

English version 1:

Profits gained by the investors and businessmen from the Development Zone enterprises will be exempted from tax when remitted out of China.

The English translation is not faithful to the Chinese version.

(1)“客商从开发区企业分得的利润”is translated into “Profits gained by the investors and businessmen from the Development Zone”(客商在开发区的赢利), which is of much difference with the Chinese meaning. Such translation may bring misunderstanding and cause economic dispute. “分得” should be translated into “dividend”.

(2)“免征所得税”is translated into “be exempted from tax”(免征); “汇出境外时”is translated into “when remitted out of China”, which implies

that “征税是在汇款时进行”。It fails to correctly convert the original information.

The above sentence should be re-translated into the following:

English version 2:

Profits dividend by the investors and businessmen from the Development Zone enterprises will be exempted from personal income tax if remitted out of China.

Besides focusing on accurate expression of information like dates and numbers, Business English also needs to pay special attention to the expression involving promise because some business documents may involve legal obligation. A translator needs to consider those words and choose the most proper expression. For example,

我方保证决不重犯这种错误。

Version 1: We assure you that this error will never occur again.

Version 2: We will do all we can to prevent a repetition of this error.

There is no grammar mistake in either version. However, the italic words in version 1 are too extreme and leave little flexibility. It might become an excuse for the possible future arbitration.

3.2 Expressiveness

Expressiveness here means that the translation should meet the grammar requirements and conventional usage of the target language. For example,

The contract shall be governed by domestic laws both parties.

Version 1:本合同应被买卖双方的国内法律管辖。

Version 2:由买卖双方的国内法律管辖本合同。

Version 3:本合同应受买卖双方的国内法律管辖。

We can clearly see that the third version is the best one. In version 1,“被管辖”and“被管制”is not standard Chinese while version 2 does not abide by document norms.

Business English also requires completeness in content to avoid misunderstanding. For instance, when composing the offer, the seller needs to give all the trading terms including the name, quantity, specification, price, delivery date, payment terms, etc. For example,

蝴蝶牌手提式缝纫机 200台,CIF xxx,每台150元,不可撤消即期信用证付款,立即装船,1月30日复到有效。

English version: COMMODITY BUTTERFLY BRAND PORTABLE SEWING MACHINES 200 Pcs. RMB 250 EACH CIF xxx IRREVOCABLE SIGHT L/C PROMPT SHIPMENT VALID SUBJECT REPLY HERE 30/1

The translation includes all the information like product name, quantity, unite price and payment. “Here” is necessary. If it is written as reply 30/1, it means the counter offer is sent on 30/1; with “here”, it means the counter offer shall arrive to us by 30/1.

3.3 Elegance

In Yan Fu's theory about translation, “elegance” is the highest level in translation. However, he means that the original version should be translated according to the grammar or structure of Chinese before the Han Dynasty. That view has aroused arguments. In modern translation theory, “elegance” means to show the style of the original version in a proper way. Business English has its unique stylistic characteristics such as formalness, conciseness and declining tone etc., which need to be considered during translation. For instance,

The buyer or his agent shall be liable for booking shipping space or chartering a Bessel for the contractual goods.

Chinese version:

买方或其代理人必须负责合约订售货物的租船定舱事宜。

The original version uses “shall” to emphasis that “booking shipping space” is the obligation of the buyer. So we use “必须” to convert the mood.

4. Conclusion

Business correspondence is the means by which business people conduct dealings and transaction. Thus, in this special trade, time is money. Effective communication is their main purpose. This thesis is about the translation principles of Business English. Besides, translators should integrate relevant knowledge into common translation skills so as to achieve the final goal of effective business communication.