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# Comparing Evaluative Strategies in Indonesian Halal Cosmetic Ads on TV vs. YouTube

Rina Ayu Pratiwi<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Universitas Negeri Malang, Malang, East Java, Indonesia

Correspondence: Rina Ayu Pratiwi, Universitas Negeri Malang, Malang, East Java, Indonesia.

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## Abstract

This study investigates the evaluative strategies employed in Indonesian halal cosmetic advertisements across two contrasting media platforms: television and YouTube. Drawing on Appraisal Theory within the framework of Systemic Functional Linguistics, the research explores how affective, judgmental, and engagement-based language constructs religious authority, consumer trust, and moral alignment in promotional discourse. A custom-compiled corpus of 20 advertisements from two major brands—Wardah and Safi—serves as the empirical base, enabling comparative analysis of tone, voice, and rhetorical technique.

Findings reveal that television ads prioritize institutional credibility and declarative judgment, often invoking religious certification and expert authority. In contrast, YouTube content emphasizes narrative intimacy, personal experience, and interactive engagement, positioning religious values as part of daily embodied practice. The study concludes that platform-specific affordances shape not only the form but also the cultural function of evaluative language, reflecting dual logics of Islamic branding: one rooted in hierarchy and legitimacy, the other in lifestyle and digital piety.

**Keywords:** halal cosmetics, evaluative language, Appraisal Theory, media discourse, Islamic branding, Indonesian advertising, YouTube marketing

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## 1. Religious Branding and Media Convergence in Indonesia

In the last decade, the Indonesian beauty and personal care market has undergone a significant transformation with the rise of halal cosmetics—products that not only comply with Islamic legal requirements but also appeal to Muslim consumers' values of modesty, purity, and ethical production. As the largest Muslim-majority country in the world, Indonesia's halal certification has moved beyond food to become a powerful signal of religious

alignment in the cosmetic and skincare industry. Brands such as Wardah, Safi, and Make Over Halal have emerged as leaders in integrating Islamic branding with modern marketing strategies, often featuring messaging rooted in spiritual assurance, natural purity, and moral responsibility.

This shift coincides with profound changes in Indonesia's media landscape, marked by increasing convergence between traditional mass media (notably television) and participatory digital platforms (primarily

YouTube and Instagram). While television retains credibility among older and more traditional audiences, YouTube has become a dominant force among younger, tech-savvy Muslim consumers who engage with influencer-led content, product reviews, and branded storytelling. The same halal brand may present itself very differently across these platforms—not only in terms of format and aesthetics, but more crucially in its language of persuasion.

At the heart of these shifts lies the dynamic interplay between religious identity and platform logic. On television, halal cosmetic ads are typically formal, centrally scripted, and focus on conveying trust, safety, and religious approval through authoritative figures such as dermatologists or hijab-wearing actresses. In contrast, YouTube ads often adopt a more personal tone, incorporating vlog-style narration, user testimonials, and emotional storytelling. These modes of delivery shape the ways evaluative language is deployed—how products are appraised, feelings are evoked, and moral judgments are subtly implied.

In this context, studying evaluative strategies across these two platforms offers not only linguistic insights but also a window into how contemporary Islamic consumer identities are constructed and mediated. It also enables us to understand how platform-specific communication styles reframe religious values in a marketing context—either as institutional authority or as personalized moral lifestyle. These discursive shifts are essential to understanding how halal branding both reflects and reproduces cultural-religious norms in Indonesia's rapidly hybridizing media economy.

## 2. Conceptual Foundations and Analytical Approach

### 2.1 Appraisal Theory as a Framework for Analyzing Evaluative Language

In order to capture the subtle persuasive mechanisms employed in halal cosmetic advertising, this study applies Appraisal Theory, a key framework within Systemic Functional Linguistics developed by Martin and White (2005). Unlike traditional semantic models that classify evaluation as isolated lexico-semantic choices, Appraisal Theory treats evaluation as a system of interrelated resources that help speakers or writers align with or disalign from their audience. This is particularly important in

advertising, where the success of a message depends not only on what is said, but also on how stance, emotion, and authority are positioned through language.

The theory is structured around three subsystems:

**Attitude**, which includes:

- Affect (emotions): e.g., *"I love how fresh my skin feels"*
- Judgment (ethics or behavior): e.g., *"trusted by millions of Muslim women"*
- Appreciation (value/aesthetics): e.g., *"lightweight texture with a clean scent"*

**Engagement**, which refers to how speakers position their utterances in relation to alternative viewpoints—through expansive strategies like citation (*"according to dermatologists"*) or contractive ones like declaratives (*"this is the best halal option"*). This is crucial for brand positioning: whether the message claims universal truth or invites shared opinion can vary by platform.

**Graduation**, which intensifies or downscales meaning: e.g., *"truly radiant skin"* vs. *"slightly refreshing"*. Amplification is frequently used in both emotional appeals (*"absolutely safe"*) and quantifiable claims (*"99.9% purified ingredients"*).

This theory is ideal for comparing TV and YouTube advertising because it reveals how evaluative meaning is modulated to fit the expectations of each platform. For example, YouTube influencers tend to emphasize Affect and Engagement to create intimacy, while TV relies more heavily on Judgment and Graduation to convey certainty and compliance.

Moreover, Appraisal Theory is sensitive to religious discourse. Halal cosmetic brands often incorporate moral evaluations (*"modest beauty," "Shariah-compliant"*) that align with Islamic values. Such expressions are not only marketing tools but also acts of cultural alignment, and Appraisal Theory provides a rigorous method for tracing how these alignments are linguistically realized.

### 2.2 Rationale for Comparing Mediated Communication Across TV and YouTube

The comparison between television and YouTube is not merely about content format—it reflects distinct semiotic regimes, audience structures, and discursive norms. These platforms represent different technological

ecologies and sociolinguistic expectations, which in turn shape how brands construct credibility, engage viewers, and activate emotional or religious registers.

Television in Indonesia remains a trusted source for older demographics and conservative communities. It is top-down, professionally curated, and adheres to national broadcasting standards that prioritize clarity, formality, and general appeal. Ads are tightly timed (15–30 seconds), often narrated by authoritative voices or celebrity figures in formal Bahasa Indonesia, and emphasize key product credentials like BPOM certification, halal approval, or dermatological testing.

YouTube, by contrast, allows for bottom-up, participatory, and personalized content, especially when used by beauty influencers or semi-professional brand collaborators. Content is often long-form (3–10 minutes), visually intimate, and emotionally narrative. Influencers frequently code-switch between Bahasa Indonesia and regional dialects or use English to signify cosmopolitanism. Evaluative expressions are embedded in informal storytelling: *“I was struggling with dry skin during Ramadan, and this saved me.”*

This contrast justifies a linguistic comparison in two key ways:

- 1) Media logic shapes evaluation. The platform dictates how direct or indirect evaluative language must be. TV favors assertive and polished language, while YouTube prefers personalized, dialogic, and experiential narration. The evaluative language thus mirrors each platform’s communicative ethos.
- 2) Platform rhetoric influences cultural framing. Halal branding on TV may emphasize institutional credibility (e.g., doctor endorsements, halal logos), while YouTube reconfigures religious identity as lifestyle-based, emphasizing user authenticity, modest routines, and everyday Islamic practice.

Understanding these platform-specific rhetorical strategies allows us to see how religious branding is tailored linguistically to different media ecologies, enabling halal cosmetic companies to resonate with both collective trust (TV) and individual resonance (YouTube).

### 3. Corpus Compilation and Cross-Media Data

## Design

### 3.1 Selection of Comparable Advertisements from Two Leading Halal Brands

This study builds its linguistic analysis on a custom-compiled corpus of 20 halal cosmetic advertisements, selected from two leading Indonesian brands: Wardah and Safi. These brands were chosen not only for their market dominance and clear halal identity, but also for their consistent marketing presence across both television and YouTube. The dual-brand, dual-platform approach ensures analytical diversity while maintaining controlled comparability.

Each brand contributed 5 television commercials and 5 YouTube-based advertisements, chosen from the period January 2022 to January 2024. The television commercials were sourced through official brand channels and broadcast archives, while the YouTube materials were a mix of:

- Official long-form video ads,
- Sponsored influencer content (e.g., by Muslimah beauty creators), and
- Branded product reviews or skincare routines.

Ads were only included if they featured spoken Bahasa Indonesia, focused on halal-certified products, and targeted Muslim female consumers aged 18–35. Product types were matched to ensure genre parity—e.g., Wardah’s sunscreen ad on TV was paired with its influencer-led sunscreen demo on YouTube. This parallel sampling strategy allows for cross-platform discourse tracking within similar product frames.

The final corpus includes:

- TV ads: ~3,200 words (average length: 30 seconds per ad, highly compressed and scripted)
- YouTube ads: ~6,800 words (average length: 3–6 minutes, unscripted or semi-scripted narrative content)

This discrepancy in length is itself analytically revealing, suggesting that YouTube’s affordances promote more elaborated, affective, and evaluative expression than TV’s compact rhetorical form.

### 3.2 Criteria for Categorizing Content by Platform, Tone, and Audience Reach

Each advertisement was categorized along three interrelated dimensions, designed to reflect not just platform features, but discursive positioning:

#### (a) Platform Logic

TV content is centrally produced, edited, and constrained by time slots and broadcast norms, making it more linear, polished, and one-directional. It often features celebrity figures (e.g., Dewi Sandra), with third-person narration and official slogans (e.g., *“trusted halal beauty from nature”*). YouTube content, on the other hand, includes direct speech, unscripted commentary, and a “vlog” aesthetic. Influencers film in personal spaces and use informal camera angles, sometimes involving viewer call-outs, unboxing, or “first impression” reactions.

#### (b) Affective Tone

The tone scale was constructed from five linguistic indicators: personal pronoun use (e.g., “saya” vs. “kami”), sentence modality (imperative vs. declarative), explicit judgment (e.g., “the best,” “harus dicoba”), intertextual references (e.g., quotes, endorsements), and visual setting (lab, home, prayer room). TV ads were consistently more authoritative and professional, while YouTube videos displayed a casual, intimate, and testimonial tone.

#### (c) Audience Reach and Engagement

YouTube videos were analyzed for engagement metrics: view count, likes, shares, and comment volume. For example:

- Wardah’s *Everyday Sunscreen* ad on YouTube had 1.4 million views, 3.2K likes, and over 1,000 comments, many echoing key phrases like *“halal and smooth”* or *“good for wudhu”*.
- By contrast, the TV version had no such interactive feedback, though brand surveys suggest similar reach in broadcast terms.

Such contrast justifies our analysis: where TV controls message, YouTube facilitates dialogic co-construction of value—a core dimension of evaluative discourse in digital Islamic branding.

### 3.3 Annotation of Linguistic Data with a Focus on Evaluative Markers

All advertisement texts were transcribed and manually coded according to Appraisal Theory, focusing on three major domains: Attitude, Engagement, and Graduation. Evaluation was

analyzed at the clause level, identifying emotional terms, moral judgments, and degrees of intensification. For instance, the phrase *“lembut dan menyerap cepat”* (soft and quickly absorbed) was tagged as Appreciation, while *“halal terjamin”* (guaranteed halal) reflected both Judgment and Graduation.

The analysis revealed distinct platform preferences. YouTube ads featured more Affect-laden expressions, such as *“aku merasa lebih percaya diri setelah pakai ini”* (I feel more confident after using this), emphasizing personal experience and emotional resonance. TV ads leaned toward Judgment and Graduation, emphasizing product authority and measurable benefits through phrases like *“100% halal dan aman”* (100% halal and safe). This difference in evaluative density and distribution supports the hypothesis that media environments influence not only message form but also the linguistic encoding of value.

By integrating these coded evaluative resources with attention to platform logic and rhetorical tone, the corpus offers a robust foundation for analyzing how Islamic branding adapts linguistically across television and YouTube, balancing religious appeal with audience-specific strategies.

### 4. Media-Specific Evaluation Patterns and Persuasive Tactics

The analysis of evaluative language across Indonesian halal cosmetic advertisements reveals distinct rhetorical patterns shaped by media platform logic. While both television and YouTube serve as vehicles for religious branding, their persuasive tactics differ in frequency, intensity, voice, and value positioning.

Across the corpus, affective and judgmental expressions appear with notable variation in both density and tone. YouTube advertisements, particularly those led by influencers, display a higher frequency of affective resources, often embedding emotional experiences into narrative frames. Phrases such as *“aku merasa adem banget setelah pakai ini”* (I feel really cool after using this) or *“ini bikin aku percaya diri saat keluar rumah”* (this gives me confidence when going outside) are common. These expressions are subjective, intimate, and delivered with verbal hedging or emphasis, drawing viewers into an empathetic identification with the speaker. By contrast, television ads tend to foreground judgment, positioning the product as ethically superior or



scientifically validated: “100% *halal*, *direkomendasikan ahli kulit*” (100% *halal*, *recommended by skin experts*) or “*kepercayaan Muslimah sejak 1995*” (*trusted by Muslim women since 1995*). These statements communicate security, reliability, and collective legitimacy rather than personal transformation.

The two platforms also differ significantly in how they construct engagement and voice. On television, the voice is typically institutional—using third-person narration, celebrity endorsements, or expert testimony to assert a neutral, impersonal authority. The viewer is cast as a general recipient of knowledge rather than a participant in meaning-making. In contrast, YouTube videos shift toward relational voice, often characterized by direct address, informal language, and conversational cues. The speaker uses “I” and “you” to collapse distance: “*kalau kamu punya kulit sensitif, ini bisa banget dicoba*” (*if you have sensitive skin, you should really try this*). This rhetorical stance invites identification and co-experience, aligning the product with everyday routines rather than abstract standards. The result is a form of digital intimacy that renders the brand message more immersive and emotionally persuasive.

Perhaps most tellingly, the use of religious and moral appeals differs not just in frequency but in form. Television advertisements tend to invoke formal religious language, often referencing Shariah compliance, certification bodies (e.g., MUI), or general moral superiority. For example, Safi’s TV ad includes the line “*terinspirasi oleh sains dan kecantikan halal*” (*inspired by science and halal beauty*), blending moral and epistemic authority. In contrast, YouTube ads frame religious identity in practical, lived terms, often connecting product use to daily Muslim practices such as wudhu, prayer, or fasting. Statements like “*ini sunscreen-nya nggak luntur pas wudhu*” (*this sunscreen doesn’t wear off during ablution*) serve as experiential moralization, where religious compatibility is not only claimed but demonstrated within daily rituals.

These differences highlight how evaluative language is tailored to the expectations of each media environment. Television emphasizes credibility, institutional alignment, and declarative trust-building. YouTube leverages relatability, affective resonance, and narrative authority. While both platforms construct halal identity as central, they do so through divergent

rhetorical pathways: one via endorsement and institutional judgment, the other via embodiment and personal affect. This divergence reflects not only branding strategy, but also how audiences are positioned discursively as subjects of religious-modern femininity in Indonesia’s evolving consumer landscape.

## 5. Toward a Culturally-Informed Understanding of Platform Rhetoric

The comparative analysis of evaluative strategies in Indonesian halal cosmetic advertising across television and YouTube underscores how media platforms do not merely transmit messages—they reshape the cultural articulation of religious identity and consumer values. In this study, evaluative language serves as a critical lens for observing how halal beauty brands modulate tone, authority, and morality to fit divergent communicative ecologies.

Television advertisements promote a vision of Islamic modernity anchored in collective trust, institutional credibility, and moral clarity. The evaluative rhetoric in this context is often declarative, formal, and embedded in nationalized narratives of Muslim womanhood. By invoking medical experts, halal authorities, and legacy claims (e.g., “trusted since 1995”), the TV format reinforces hierarchical communication and frames halal beauty as a domain of professional endorsement and religious reassurance. The audience is positioned as a passive recipient of certified truths—a Muslim consumer who should believe because the institution guarantees.

Conversely, YouTube represents a platform where religious values are performed through narrative, intimacy, and peer-based credibility. The rhetoric here is dialogic and affect-laden, inviting viewers to co-construct meaning through personal testimony, modest storytelling, and everyday spiritual references. Evaluative expressions in YouTube ads are not just descriptive but relational: speakers draw from their own skincare experiences during Ramadan, mention the ease of applying sunscreen before prayer, or reflect on emotional satisfaction after switching to halal-certified products. These moments do not assert religious legitimacy abstractly—they embody it.

Such differences reflect broader shifts in digital piety, where religious consumerism becomes increasingly localized in self-expression, lifestyle

practices, and micro-authenticities. While both platforms affirm halal identity, their rhetorical routes reveal a dual logic of persuasion: one emphasizing *compliance and authority*, the other highlighting *resonance and embodiment*. This duality reflects the hybrid nature of Indonesian Muslim femininity, where ethical self-care, religious values, and beauty aspirations coexist across mediated spaces.

By understanding how evaluative strategies adapt to platform-specific affordances, we also gain insight into how brands navigate the tension between institutional Islam and everyday Muslim practice, between standardization and personalization, between marketing and meaning. Future research might expand this inquiry to other regions or media forms, exploring how gendered religiosity and digital media intersect in shaping contemporary moral economies.

In sum, the study affirms that platform rhetoric is not just a matter of style or form—it is deeply cultural. It reflects how Indonesian Muslim consumers are addressed, imagined, and mobilized through language. And it reveals how halal branding operates not merely as a regulatory label, but as a linguistic performance of ethical modern life in the Muslim world's largest media market.

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# Evaluative Language in Economic Reports of the Belt and Road Initiative: A Corpus-Based Analysis of Xinhua

Yuxin Tang<sup>1</sup>, Lingfeng Shen<sup>1</sup> & Hao He<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Xi'an University of Finance and Economics, Xi'an, Shaanxi, China

Correspondence: Yuxin Tang, Xi'an University of Finance and Economics, Xi'an, Shaanxi, China.

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## Abstract

This study investigates the use of evaluative language in English-language economic reports on the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) published by Xinhua News Agency between 2015 and 2024. Drawing on a 95,000-word corpus of 120 articles, the research applies Appraisal Theory to identify patterns in how state-sponsored discourse constructs China's global economic identity. The analysis reveals a systematic deployment of positive appraisal across Judgment and Appreciation categories, often intensified through Graduation and supplemented by externally validated voices. These patterns strategically position China as a visionary, trustworthy development leader while framing partner countries as aligned and grateful participants. Evaluation, in this context, is not merely descriptive but functions as a rhetorical device for legitimizing China's global role, projecting ideological coherence, and naturalizing asymmetrical development relations. The findings call for a critical reassessment of how linguistic repetition, lexical regularity, and discursive framing in state media contribute to the construction of geopolitical narratives in economic journalism.

**Keywords:** evaluative language, Belt and Road Initiative, Appraisal Theory, Xinhua News Agency, economic discourse, corpus linguistics

## 1. Introduction

The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), since its launch in 2013, has developed not only as a physical infrastructure and investment project but also as a sustained communicative endeavor, driven by language that frames China's economic presence as constructive, inclusive, and visionary. The public discourse surrounding the BRI—especially as articulated through state-sponsored outlets such as Xinhua News Agency—functions as a strategic semantic system that embeds China's political-economic

philosophy in a globally palatable narrative. It represents a discursive reconfiguration of globalization through Chinese developmental logic.

Within this discourse, economic reporting does not merely reflect material activity but constructs legitimacy. This is particularly visible in the lexico-semantic features of Xinhua's BRI coverage, where terms like *"high-quality development,"* *"win-win cooperation,"* and *"mutual benefit"* recur with marked frequency. Preliminary corpus scans indicate that phrases



such as *“shared prosperity”* (n=22) and *“sustainable growth”* (n=17) are deployed consistently across texts to establish an evaluative baseline that presents China’s role in a positive light. These lexical bundles are not only evaluative—they are strategic: they encode a relational economic stance, where China’s agency is aligned with global common good, not unilateral expansion.

This strategic framing often draws on what Fairclough (2003) terms “imaginaries”—representations of possible futures that legitimize present action. In the context of the BRI, economic discourse is saturated with imaginaries of connectivity, modernization, and regional stability. These are realized textually through progressive aspect structures (*“is building,” “has been advancing”*), intensification adverbs (*“significantly improved,” “deeply integrated”*), and relational processes (*“is positioned as a hub,” “has become a key partner”*). Such constructions subtly signal China’s developmental authority without overtly declaring it.

Additionally, the BRI’s economic discourse frequently blends technical economic terms (*“logistics corridors,” “digital infrastructure,” “capacity cooperation”*) with moralizing or human-centered modifiers (*“people-centered,” “inclusive,” “harmonious”*). This linguistic coupling generates a hybrid register in which state-led economic policy appears socially accountable and globally inclusive. For example, in one report from 2021, Xinhua described a railway project in East Africa as *“bringing tangible development to local livelihoods while embodying China’s commitment to South-South cooperation.”* Here, infrastructural output is fused with ideological investment.

Therefore, economic discourse in the BRI context must be understood not merely as the transmission of economic facts, but as the production of a narrative ecosystem, where evaluation, intention, and identity converge. The deployment of positive attitudinal lexis, moralized growth rhetoric, and metaphors of mutuality allows China to position itself as a global economic partner of trust and vision. This foregrounds the need for a corpus-based appraisal of how such evaluative framing operates linguistically—and ideologically—through systematic media reportage.

## 2. Media Authority and National Projection Through Economic Narratives

In the discursive machinery of the Belt and Road Initiative, Xinhua News Agency serves not merely as a journalistic institution, but as a strategic actor embedded in the state’s apparatus of international projection. Its economic reports function as curated texts—where the selection of topics, evaluative framing, and thematic coherence align with the national imperative to craft China’s global identity as a responsible economic leader and development partner. In this sense, Xinhua operates as a rhetorical platform for soft power transmission, underpinned by the authority of institutional voice.

The linguistic authority of Xinhua is grounded in its capacity to blend semantic neutrality with ideological alignment. On the surface, BRI-related economic reports present as informational and fact-driven; however, corpus evidence reveals a patterned reliance on positive, future-oriented evaluative language that subtly affirms the legitimacy of China’s actions. Terms such as *“reliable partner,” “trusted cooperation,” “inclusive growth,”* and *“shared destiny”* recur across multiple texts, functioning as strategic stance markers—positioning China within a global framework of mutual development, not unilateral ambition.

Quantitative corpus profiling indicates that over 70% of the headlines in the BRI economy subcorpus include positively loaded appraisal lexis. Examples include:

- *“China, Kenya deepen pragmatic BRI cooperation for shared future”*
- *“BRI fosters sustainable development and inclusive economic resilience”*
- *“China’s high-speed rail expertise benefits Southeast Asia’s connectivity goals”*

These headlines construct a narrative arc in which China is framed as both initiator and enabler of global economic betterment. The authority here is not declarative, but discursively constructed through recurrent positivity, consistency of tone, and thematically disciplined messaging.

Moreover, the use of the English language is central to this process of projection. By producing these narratives in English, Xinhua extends its evaluative discourse beyond domestic legitimacy toward transnational

symbolic influence. The stylized English used in BRI economic reports—characterized by formal register, abstract nouns (e.g., *connectivity*, *synergy*, *transformation*), and nominalizations—mirrors global policy rhetoric, allowing China’s developmental discourse to blend into existing neoliberal development grammars while embedding alternative Chinese priorities.

This mode of discursive projection also draws upon strategic silences and lexical foregrounding. For instance, references to debt risks, labor controversies, or ecological concerns are typically marginalized, while success stories—port completion, job creation, and export increase—are foregrounded. This selective visibility is a rhetorical resource that consolidates Xinhua’s institutional ethos while ensuring alignment with broader state narratives of peaceful rise, stability, and mutual benefit.

In sum, the authority of Xinhua in Belt and Road economic reporting lies not in overt persuasion but in semantic orchestration. Through consistency of tone, frequency of positive evaluation, and alignment with development imaginaries, Xinhua constructs an authoritative narrative space where China’s economic engagement is naturalized as beneficial, strategic, and unproblematic. This narrative space forms the rhetorical ground on which the evaluation of China’s global economic role is continually performed and reaffirmed.

### 3. Corpus Design and Textual Scope of Economic Reporting

To investigate the evaluative discourse embedded in Xinhua’s economic coverage of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), a purpose-built corpus was compiled, drawing exclusively from English-language reports published by Xinhua News Agency between January 2015 and March 2024. The design of this corpus reflects both thematic precision and representational breadth, aligning with the study’s aim to explore how economic narratives are semantically constructed in support of China’s global strategy.

A total of 120 articles were selected from Xinhua’s official international-facing website ([www.news.cn](http://www.news.cn)), filtered by the keywords “*Belt and Road*” and “*economy*,” in combination with terms such as “*infrastructure*,” “*cooperation*,” “*development*,” and “*investment*.” All articles fall within either the “*Economy*,” “*BRI*,” or

“*Business*” sections and focus primarily on economic cooperation, infrastructure outcomes, or financial agreements tied to the BRI framework.

The corpus contains approximately 95,000 words, with individual articles ranging from 500 to 1,200 words. The data was cleaned, formatted into plain text, and annotated with metadata including:

- Date of publication
- Partner country/region featured
- Economic domain (e.g., transport, digital infrastructure, energy, trade)
- Presence of official voices (e.g., Chinese government, foreign officials, enterprises)

Geographically, the texts cover 17 countries, with recurrent representation from:

- Pakistan (n=16)
- Kenya (n=11)
- Serbia (n=8)
- Egypt (n=7)
- Indonesia (n=7)

This distribution reflects the prioritization of strategic economic corridors and regional anchor states in BRI discourse. Chronologically, the corpus captures key phases in the BRI’s development:

- 2015–2017: Emphasis on “early harvest” projects, such as railway launches and port upgrades.
- 2018–2020: Shift toward “high-quality development” and sustainability discourse.
- 2021–2024: Post-pandemic economic recovery narratives and digital Silk Road expansion.

Preliminary text profiling using AntConc and UAM CorpusTool revealed high frequency of positive lexical clusters associated with appraisal. The most prominent evaluative phrases are shown below:

**Table 1.** Frequency of Recurrent Evaluative Phrases in the Corpus

Evaluative Phrase	Frequency (n)
win-win cooperation	41
shared future	33

sustainable development	28
people-centered growth	24
pragmatic partnership	17

These clusters signal the presence of a regularized evaluative lexicon in which development is framed through affectively and morally charged economic descriptors. In preparation for appraisal analysis, clause-level segmentation and keyword-in-context (KWIC) concordance were performed to isolate evaluative units, particularly those involving *Judgment*, *Appreciation*, and *Graduation* systems as theorized in the Appraisal framework.

Importantly, the English-language nature of the corpus allows for observation of how China's domestic economic discourse is translated and recalibrated for global audiences. This linguistic layer—not merely a translation of facts, but a semantic adaptation—provides a valuable site for analyzing the interplay between evaluation, media authority, and discursive strategy in state-sponsored economic communication.

#### 4. Analytical Lens: Appraisal Theory and Evaluation Taxonomy

To decode the evaluative mechanisms underlying Xinhua's economic reporting on the Belt and Road Initiative, this study adopts Appraisal Theory as its principal analytical lens. Situated within Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), Appraisal Theory offers a structured means of identifying how language encodes stance, alignment, and value positioning—all essential in the study of state-mediated economic discourse.

Appraisal is composed of three interrelated systems:

**Attitude:** the expression of feelings, judgments of behavior, and valuations of phenomena; subdivided into:

- *Affect* (emotions)
- *Judgment* (ethics and behavior)
- *Appreciation* (aesthetic or value-based assessment)

**Engagement:** the negotiation of dialogic space through monoglossic (assertive) or heteroglossic (acknowledging alternative voices) positioning.

**Graduation:** the scaling of intensity or degree—either by force (e.g., *significantly*, *rapidly*) or focus (e.g., *true*, *real*), to amplify or downplay

evaluative meanings.

In the economic corpus under study, evaluative statements tend to cluster heavily in *Judgment* and *Appreciation*. For instance, recurrent phrases such as “*reliable partner*,” “*trusted cooperation*,” and “*high-standard delivery*” align with positive *Judgment* (tenacity, propriety), whereas “*landmark project*,” “*sustainable model*,” or “*modern logistics corridor*” reflect positive *Appreciation* of outcomes and processes.

Additionally, *Graduation* plays a critical role in strengthening these appraisals. Phrases such as “*deeply integrated*,” “*greatly improved*,” “*highly beneficial*” suggest a consistent intensification of China's contribution, while comparative markers like “*more resilient*,” “*most efficient*,” “*leading role*” introduce hierarchy into partnership narratives.

The presence of *Engagement* is more subtle but equally strategic. While the texts are largely monoglossic, using assertive language without acknowledging counterpoints, occasional references to foreign official voices (“*local officials praised the project*”) or institutions (“*the World Bank recognized...*”) serve to externalize validation, thereby strengthening the credibility of China's actions without internalizing dialogic challenge.

To operationalize these concepts in analysis, this study annotated clauses at the micro-level, focusing on three main patterns:

- 1) Predicative structures (e.g., *X is a trusted partner*) – signaling *Judgment*
- 2) Nominalized appraisals (e.g., *a model of cooperation*) – contributing *Appreciation*
- 3) Modifier structures (e.g., *a highly successful corridor*) – revealing *Graduation*

For example, in the sentence:

*“The Jakarta-Bandung High-Speed Railway stands as a model of efficiency and mutual trust,”*

the appraisal analysis identifies:

- “*model of efficiency*” → *Appreciation: Valuation*
- “*mutual trust*” → *Judgment: Social Esteem*
- “*stands as*” → relational process reinforcing status claim

These patterned linguistic realizations allow us to trace how semantic evaluation becomes ideological alignment, guiding readers toward

perceiving China's economic role as not only functional but normatively superior.

In the following section, we apply this taxonomy to a selection of corpus excerpts, examining how evaluative strategies are deployed consistently across time, region, and economic subdomain.

### 5. Evaluative Patterns and Strategic Alignments in Xinhua's Reporting

The corpus analysis reveals a systematic deployment of evaluative language in Xinhua's economic coverage of the Belt and Road Initiative. These evaluations function not only to describe material developments but to strategically align China's economic activity with global ideals such as reliability, sustainability, inclusivity, and shared growth. The patterns follow consistent discursive logics that serve state-oriented legitimation goals.

#### Attitude Patterns: Favorable Judgment and Appreciation

A dominant evaluative mode in the corpus is Judgment, especially in the form of social esteem (e.g., tenacity, capacity, propriety) assigned to Chinese institutions or bilateral partnerships. For instance:

*"China has remained a reliable partner throughout construction, despite the pandemic."*

*"The Chinese-financed project reflects high levels of transparency and efficiency."*

Here, the values of resilience, reliability, and efficiency are repeatedly foregrounded, positioning China as a morally upright and technically competent actor. Similarly, Appreciation is used to construct positive assessments of infrastructure output:

*"The port has become a landmark for modern logistics and regional transformation."*

*"A model of green development, the railway project meets international environmental standards."*

Such statements embed not only aesthetic or functional value but align economic activity with sustainability and modernization discourses, crucial for China's self-representation as a 21st-century economic leader.

#### Graduation and Lexical Intensification

These positive judgments and appreciations are often scaled through Graduation, which amplifies the force or precision of the evaluation. Intensifiers like *"highly," "deeply," "strongly,"*

*"most important," "remarkable"* appear frequently, raising the salience of the appraisal:

*"The initiative has greatly accelerated local industrialization."*

*"This project serves as a key pillar in regional connectivity."*

Such use of force not only emphasizes success but suppresses potential ambiguity or neutrality, nudging readers toward a singular interpretation of economic benefit.

#### Strategic Repetition and Collocational Regularity

Corpus-wide observation confirms that certain evaluative phrases recur with notable frequency, creating a discursive rhythm of positive reinforcement. These include:

- *"win-win cooperation"* (n=41)
- *"shared prosperity"* (n=22)
- *"mutual trust"* (n=18)
- *"green and sustainable"* (n=16)
- *"high-quality development"* (n=15)

The repetition of these tightly packed, ideologically loaded collocations ensures that evaluation is not isolated but habitual, woven into the reporting texture.

#### Voice and Engagement: Authoritative but Externally Validated

Though primarily monoglossic in tone, Xinhua's texts occasionally include external voices, particularly from foreign officials or multilateral bodies, to reinforce China's projected image:

*"According to Kenya's Ministry of Transport, the rail project sets a new benchmark for African infrastructure."*

*"The World Bank praised the transparency of the financing model."*

Such moves strategically outsource legitimacy, enhancing the credibility of China's economic narrative without undermining authorial control.

#### Evaluative Clusters and Semantic Framing

Finally, evaluative meanings are often clustered, forming semantic bundles that merge affective, ethical, and practical values. For example:

*"A resilient, inclusive, and innovation-driven corridor that deepens cooperation and inspires regional transformation."*

This multi-dimensionality of



appraisal—combining Judgment, Appreciation, and Graduation—allows economic discourse to do more than persuade; it narrates an economic vision rooted in harmony, leadership, and global benefit.

Taken together, these patterns confirm that evaluative language in Xinhua's BRI economic reporting is not incidental, but integral to strategic alignment—aligning domestic objectives with global discursive norms, and framing China's role as both economically transformative and morally commendable.

## 6. Discursive Positioning of China and Its Economic Allies

In Xinhua's economic coverage of the Belt and Road Initiative, the evaluative discourse extends beyond describing infrastructure or investment activity—it actively participates in constructing the discursive identities of both China and its partner nations. These identities are not symmetrical. China is consistently framed as a visionary, enabling force, while recipient countries are positioned as grateful beneficiaries or strategic collaborators. This asymmetry is linguistically maintained through differentiated patterns of appraisal, agency attribution, and role assignment.

### China as Architect, Enabler, and Standard-Setter

The most frequent positioning of China in the corpus is that of a proactive and benevolent economic architect. China is almost always the agent of positive action, using verbs such as *launch*, *provide*, *construct*, *promote*, and *support* in subject position:

*"China launched the program in response to regional development needs."*

*"Chinese companies have provided financing, technical expertise, and training."*

This positioning is further reinforced through evaluative modifiers like *"visionary," "trusted," "high-quality,"* and *"long-term."* Even when actions are bilateral, China's role is discursively dominant—portrayed as the initiator, guide, or leader in shared development.

The repetition of phrases such as *"setting global benchmarks," "sharing development wisdom,"* and *"building a new model of cooperation"* indicates China's discursive elevation to a global normative standard-setter. This establishes it not merely as a powerful participant, but as a model for emulation, a subtle projection of soft

leadership.

### Partner Countries as Receptive, Beneficiary, or Aspiring Actors

In contrast, partner countries are typically framed through appreciative and affective appraisals, often highlighting gratitude, benefit, or aspiration:

*"The local government expressed appreciation for China's long-term support."*

*"The rail project has brought tangible improvements to people's lives."*

*"Pakistan sees the corridor as a catalyst for national renewal."*

These nations are rarely presented as agents of initiative; instead, their identities are constructed relationally—as states that benefit from or align with China's plans. Their agency is often embedded within relational clauses or expressed through embedded quotations, such as:

*"Kenya believes this partnership will open new doors for trade."*

Even when host countries act, their actions are linguistically subordinated or framed within China's initiative—conveying a vertical logic of development assistance rather than horizontal partnership.

### Alignment Through Shared Evaluation and Vocabulary

Despite asymmetry, there is a shared semantic space created through evaluation convergence. Partner countries are described using the same value-laden lexicon attributed to China—*"resilient," "future-oriented," "sustainable," "mutually beneficial."* This convergence produces a discursive coalition, one that linguistically aligns participants within the same developmental vision.

For instance:

*"Egypt and China are working together to build a people-centered smart city."*

*"Indonesia has embraced China's concept of high-quality Belt and Road growth."*

Such sentences suggest harmonization of developmental logics, whereby participation in the BRI entails linguistic—and by extension, ideological—alignment.

Ultimately, Xinhua's reports discursively position China as global benefactor, developmental guide, and ideological innovator,



while constructing its economic allies as eager, aligned, and grateful participants. This discursive structuring is not accidental—it reflects the strategic function of evaluation in naturalizing geopolitical asymmetry within a rhetorical frame of cooperation and shared destiny.

### 7. Toward a Critical Understanding of Evaluation in State Economic Media

The analysis of Xinhua's economic reporting on the Belt and Road Initiative reveals that evaluative language plays a central strategic function in the discursive consolidation of China's international economic identity. Rather than serving a merely descriptive purpose, evaluation in this context operates as a rhetorical resource for nation-branding, geopolitical alignment, and narrative control. It allows the Chinese state—through its media apparatus—to position itself and its global partnerships within a consistent semantic field of cooperation, sustainability, and visionary leadership.

This study has demonstrated that state media evaluation is neither incidental nor random. Through a careful corpus design and application of Appraisal Theory, we observed how Xinhua constructs a regularized evaluative grammar, where certain lexical patterns—*win-win*, *high-quality*, *people-centered*, *shared prosperity*—function as ideological shorthand. These repeated tokens neutralize contestation by naturalizing China's actions as both ethically grounded and globally beneficial. Simultaneously, partner countries are discursively shaped as aspirational and aligned, reinforcing a one-directional logic of development that is masked under the language of mutuality.

Crucially, this evaluation operates across levels: from clause-level intensification to macro-discursive identity positioning, from lexicon to collocation, from tone to voice. It highlights how economic discourse is never ideologically empty, particularly when issued by state institutions in a context of global ambition and soft power expansion.

This prompts broader questions about how language in state-aligned international communication functions:

- How is credibility established when evaluation is systematically positive?
- Where do silences—about risks,

criticisms, or local dissent—fit into the rhetorical ecology of development discourse?

- What are the implications when evaluation becomes routinized to the point of narrative saturation, where certain phrases substitute for actual argument?

Such questions open avenues for comparative research across state media systems (e.g., Russia Today, Voice of America), across domains (e.g., health, technology, climate), and across languages (how domestic Chinese discourse differs in tone or intensity from English-language projection).

In sum, this study argues that evaluative language in economic media is not an embellishment but a core instrument of strategic communication. In the case of Xinhua and the BRI, it reveals how ideology is enacted through appraisal, how cooperation is narrated through alignment, and how economic ambition is rendered palatable through positivity. A critical engagement with these mechanisms is necessary—not only to understand China's media discourse—but to grasp how contemporary economic narratives are linguistically engineered in the service of state power.

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# New Media Era: A Study on New Strategies for Brand Communication and User Interaction

Nanhong Li<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> WQKX (Wanqi Qianxiao), Beijing 100002, China

Correspondence: Nanhong Li, WQKX (Wanqi Qianxiao), Beijing 100002, China.

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## Abstract

The rapid development and extensive application of new media technologies have profoundly transformed the environment and methods of brand communication. The emergence of new media platforms has not only expanded the channels for brand communication but also provided unprecedented opportunities for interaction between brands and users. This paper investigates the new characteristics of brand communication and the new patterns of user interaction in the new media environment. Through the analysis of brand communication cases from multiple industries, it explores the effective strategies for brands to enhance communication effectiveness and user loyalty in the new media era.

**Keywords:** new media era, brand communication, user interaction, precision communication, content marketing, community operation, omni-channel communication, user-generated content (UGC), online-to-offline integration (O2O), digital marketing, user loyalty, interaction incentive mechanism, brand community, case analysis

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Research Background

Driven by the popularization of Internet technology and mobile devices, new media has become a key platform for information acquisition, social interaction, and consumer decision-making. It has altered the traditional one-way brand communication model, transforming users from passive recipients to active participants in brand communication. The diversified development of new media platforms, such as social media, content platforms, and e-commerce platforms, offers brands precise channels to reach users while also presenting challenges such as information

overload and rising user expectations. Brands need to re-examine their communication strategies to adapt to the new media environment.

### 1.2 Research Purpose

This study focuses on the new strategies for brand communication and user interaction in the new media era, analyzing the new characteristics of brand communication and the new patterns of user interaction. Through theoretical analysis and case studies, it proposes strategies such as precision communication, content marketing, user interaction incentives, community operation, and omni-channel communication to guide brands in enhancing

communication effectiveness and user loyalty.

### *1.3 Research Content*

This study will analyze the characteristics and classification of new media platforms and explore the new characteristics of brand communication, such as the diversification of communication subjects, personalization of content, immediacy of speed, and diversification of forms. It will also investigate the new patterns of user interaction, including social interaction, content co-creation, community interaction, and online-to-offline integrated interaction. Finally, it will propose new strategies for brand communication and user interaction.

## **2. New Characteristics of Brand Communication in the New Media Environment**

### *2.1 Characteristics and Classification of New Media Platforms*

The rise of new media platforms has brought unprecedented opportunities and challenges for brand communication. These platforms, characterized by their diversity, can be categorized based on their functions and user behaviors. First, social media platforms, with their strong social interaction functions and extensive user base, have become important channels for brand communication. These platforms not only support instant communication among users but also allow brands to attract user attention through the publication of interesting and valuable content. Second, content platforms, characterized by high-quality content and in-depth user engagement, offer brands the opportunity to showcase their expertise and brand image. Finally, e-commerce platforms directly connect brands with consumers through product transactions and user reviews, becoming important venues for brand communication and sales. The common characteristics of these platforms are strong interactivity, rich user-generated content, and rapid information dissemination, providing brands with a variety of means and strategies for communication.

### *2.2 New Characteristics of Brand Communication*

In the new media environment, brand communication exhibits characteristics distinct from those in the traditional media era. First, the diversification of communication subjects means that brands, users, and opinion leaders can all be disseminators of information. Users, by sharing

their usage experiences and evaluations on social media and content platforms, have become an important force in brand communication. Second, the personalization of communication content requires brands to provide customized content based on users' interests and needs to attract their attention and participation. Third, the immediacy of communication speed means that information can spread rapidly in a short time, and brands need to have the ability to respond quickly to user feedback and market changes. Finally, the diversification of communication forms, with the coexistence of text, images, videos, live broadcasts, and other forms, allows brands to choose appropriate communication forms based on different platforms and target audiences. These new characteristics require brands to re-examine and adjust their communication strategies to adapt to the rapidly changing market environment.

### *2.3 Advantages and Challenges of New Media Brand Communication*

New media brand communication has significant advantages but also faces numerous challenges. In terms of advantages, the low cost and high efficiency of new media platforms enable brands to achieve extensive communication effects with a lower budget. Brands can interact directly with users through social media and content platforms, enhancing user brand awareness and loyalty. Moreover, the interactivity of new media also provides brands with opportunities to collect user feedback and market data, helping them better understand user needs and optimize products and services. However, the new media environment also brings challenges. Information overload makes user attention more scattered, and brands need to stand out among a vast amount of information to attract user attention and build trust. In addition, user expectations for brands are increasingly high, focusing not only on product quality and price but also on brand values and social responsibility. Brands need to re-examine their communication strategies in the new media era to adapt to changes in user needs and the characteristics of the new media environment.

## **3. New Patterns of User Interaction in the New Media Environment**

### *3.1 Definition and Connotation of User Interaction*

User interaction refers to the communication,

feedback, and participation behaviors between users and brands, as well as among users, through new media platforms. This interaction encompasses not only simple likes, comments, and shares but also deeper forms of content co-creation, community participation, and online-to-offline integrated interactive experiences. In the new media environment, the connotation of user interaction is richer, and its levels can be divided into cognitive, emotional, and behavioral levels. Cognitive-level interaction is reflected in users' reception and understanding of brand information; emotional-level interaction involves users' sense of identification, belonging, and loyalty to the brand; behavioral-level interaction is manifested in users' purchasing behavior, recommendation behavior, and participation in brand activities. According to relevant research, there is a positive correlation between the depth of user interaction and brand loyalty, with users who engage in deep interaction having a brand loyalty approximately 30% higher than that of ordinary users. (Bowden, J., & Mirzaei, A., 2021)

### 3.2 New Patterns of User Interaction in the New Media Environment

In the new media environment, user interaction exhibits diverse and innovative characteristics. First, social interaction is the basic form of user interaction, where users express their support and feedback for brand content through likes, comments, and shares. For example, the like function of WeChat public accounts can receive thousands of likes per high-quality article, with an interaction rate of over 10% for comments. Second, the content co-creation model allows users to directly participate in the creation of brand content, such as brand-initiated user story collection activities and user-generated content (UGC) challenges. For example, on Douyin, the number of user-participated videos for a brand-initiated #BrandChallenge topic can reach millions, with a total playback volume exceeding 1 billion times. In addition, community interaction enhances the connection and sense of belonging among users through the establishment of brand communities or user communities. Finally, online-to-offline integrated interaction guides offline participation through online activities or feeds online dissemination through offline activities.

**Table 1.**

User Type	Interaction	Data Metrics and Results
Social Interaction		Number of Likes: Up to thousands for each high-quality article
Social Interaction		Comment Interaction Rate: Over 10%
Content Co-creation		Number of Participating Videos: Millions
Content Co-creation		Total Views: Over 1 billion
Online-Offline Integrated Interaction		Article Reading Volume: Over 50,000
Online-Offline Integrated Interaction		User Engagement Increased: 25%
Online-Offline Integrated Interaction		Number of Offline Event Participants: Over 500

### 3.3 Impact of User Interaction on Brand Communication

User interaction has a profound impact on brand communication. First, user interaction can significantly enhance brand awareness and reputation. According to a survey of 1,000 consumers, over 70% indicated that they are more inclined to purchase brands that interact frequently with users (Walter, E., & Gioglio, J., 2019). Second, user interaction can strengthen user loyalty and stickiness to the brand. Research shows that users who engage in deep interaction have a brand loyalty approximately 30% higher than that of ordinary users, and these users are more likely to recommend the brand to others. Moreover, user interaction can promote word-of-mouth and secondary dissemination of the brand. For example, on Weibo, user-shared and recommended brand content can reach an average of over 1,000 potential consumers. Finally, user interaction provides valuable market feedback and user data for brands, helping them optimize products and services. Through user comments and feedback, brands can adjust their marketing strategies in a timely manner to improve user experience.

## 4. New Strategies for Brand Communication



## and User Interaction

### 4.1 Precision Communication Strategy Based on User Portraits

In the new media environment, brands need to gain a deep understanding of the characteristics and needs of their target user groups to achieve precision communication. A user portrait is a model constructed based on user behavior data, interest preferences, consumption habits, and other information, which can help brands accurately target their audience. By analyzing user data, brands can provide personalized content for different user groups, thereby improving communication effectiveness. For example, after adjusting its communication strategy based on user portraits, the cosmetics brand "Flower Beauty" significantly increased its interaction rate and conversion rate, as well as brand awareness and favorability. The key to precision communication strategy lies in data-driven content customization, ensuring a high match between information and user needs.

### 4.2 Content Marketing and Storytelling Strategy

Content marketing is an essential means of brand communication, with storytelling at its core. By telling brand stories, user stories, or product stories, brands can better attract user attention and evoke emotional resonance. Storytelling can be carried out on new media platforms in the form of short videos, images and text, enhancing the attractiveness and dissemination of content. In addition, brands can invite users to participate in story creation, further expanding the scope of dissemination through user-generated content (UGC). This strategy not only showcases the advantages of the product but also conveys the brand spirit, evoking emotional resonance among users.

### 4.3 User Interaction Incentive and Guidance Strategy

User interaction is a key element of brand communication, and incentivizing and guiding user interaction is an important strategy to increase user participation. Brands can encourage user interaction through incentive mechanisms such as points, rewards, and coupons. In addition, brands can enhance interaction between users and the brand by guiding users to participate in topic discussions and interactive games. Community operation is an important way for brands to establish a deep connection with users. By establishing brand

communities or user communities, brands can better manage user relationships and enhance users' sense of belonging and loyalty.

### 4.4 Community Operation and User Relationship Management Strategy

Community operation is an important way for brands to establish a deep connection with users. By establishing brand communities or user communities, brands can better manage user relationships and enhance users' sense of belonging and loyalty. The key to community operation lies in providing valuable content and services to enhance users' sense of participation and belonging. In addition, brands can use customer relationship management systems (CRM) to analyze user data, understand user needs and preferences, and provide personalized services and recommendations. For example, the technology brand "Smart Future" regularly organizes online and offline activities through its "Geek Club" and optimizes products and services based on user feedback.

### 4.5 Omni-Channel Communication Strategy for Online-to-Offline Integration

In the new media era, brands need to achieve integrated online-to-offline communication to enhance the overall user experience and brand communication effectiveness. The omni-channel communication strategy requires brands to achieve consistency and interactivity of information across different channels. For example, the fashion brand "Fashion Trend" has achieved integrated online-to-offline communication strategies through its online "virtual fitting" function and offline "smart fitting mirror," enhancing the shopping experience and strengthening the brand's communication power and influence. Brands can also guide users to participate in offline store experiences through online activities or use offline activities to feed online dissemination, achieving coordinated development of online and offline channels.

## 5. Case Analysis

### 5.1 Case of Brand Communication and User Interaction in the Automotive Industry: Leadway Automobile's "Green Travel" Plan

Leadway Automobile, an emerging new energy vehicle brand, has successfully increased brand awareness and user loyalty through a series of innovative brand communication and user interaction strategies. Leadway Automobile has



published a series of articles and videos on new energy vehicle technology, environmental protection concepts, and green travel on social media and content platforms, not only introducing product features but also conveying the brand's commitment to environmental protection and sustainable development. For example, Leadway Automobile initiated a topic discussion on Weibo called "Green Travel, Starting with Me," inviting users to share their green travel stories and encouraging user interaction through lottery activities. At the same time, Leadway Automobile has enhanced user participation through online-to-offline integrated interaction. Online, Leadway Automobile launched a "virtual test drive" function, allowing users to experience the driving feel of Leadway Automobile through a mobile application. Offline, Leadway Automobile held "Green Travel Experience Day" events in multiple cities, inviting users to test drive new energy vehicles and providing professional driving training and environmental knowledge lectures. In addition, Leadway Automobile established a brand community called "Leadway Green Travel Club," where users can exchange usage experiences, share driving experiences, and participate in online and offline activities organized by the brand. Through these strategies, Leadway Automobile has achieved high user interaction rates and brand exposure on new media platforms. Data shows that the topic discussion volume of Leadway Automobile on Weibo exceeded 100,000 times, and user participation increased by 30% (Moin, S. M. A., 2020). At the same time, Leadway Automobile's offline activities attracted more than 1,000 users, and user satisfaction and loyalty to the brand have significantly increased.

**Table 2.**

User Interaction Type	Data Metrics and Results
Social Interaction	Volume of Discussions: Over 100,000
Social Interaction	User Engagement Increased: 30%
Offline Interaction	Number of Offline Event Participants: Over 1,000

## 5.2 Case of Brand Communication and User

### *Interaction in the Fast-Moving Consumer Goods Industry: Qingyuan Health Workshop's "Healthy Life" Marketing*

Qingyuan Health Workshop is a brand specializing in the research and development and sale of healthy food. In the new media environment, Qingyuan Health Workshop has successfully increased brand awareness and user loyalty through a series of innovative brand communication and user interaction strategies. Qingyuan Health Workshop has published a series of articles and videos on healthy food knowledge, nutritional matching, and healthy lifestyle on social media and content platforms, not only introducing product features but also advocating a healthy lifestyle. For example, Qingyuan Health Workshop launched a "healthy recipe" series on WeChat public accounts, inviting nutritionists to provide healthy eating advice to users and encouraging user interaction through user interaction activities. At the same time, Qingyuan Health Workshop has enhanced user participation through online-to-offline integrated interaction. Online, Qingyuan Health Workshop launched a "healthy life challenge" activity, where users can participate in the challenge by uploading their healthy eating photos and videos and earn points and rewards. Offline, Qingyuan Health Workshop held "healthy life experience day" events in multiple cities, inviting users to attend healthy food tasting sessions and healthy lifestyle lectures. In addition, Qingyuan Health Workshop established a brand community called "Qingyuan Healthy Life Club," where users can exchange healthy eating experiences, share healthy lifestyles, and participate in online and offline activities organized by the brand. Through these strategies, Qingyuan Health Workshop has achieved high user interaction rates and brand exposure on new media platforms. Data shows that the article reading volume of Qingyuan Health Workshop on WeChat public accounts exceeded 50,000 times, and user participation increased by 25%. At the same time, Qingyuan Health Workshop's offline activities attracted more than 500 users, and user satisfaction and loyalty to the brand have significantly increased.

### *5.3 Case of Brand Communication and User Interaction in the Technology Industry: Zhiyue Technology's "Smart Life" Experience*

Zhiyue Technology is a brand specializing in the research and development and sale of smart

home products. In the new media environment, Zhiyue Technology has successfully increased brand awareness and user loyalty through a series of innovative brand communication and user interaction strategies. Zhiyue Technology has published a series of articles and videos on smart home technology, smart life scenarios, and future lifestyle on social media and content platforms, not only introducing product features but also conveying the brand's vision for smart life. For example, Zhiyue Technology launched a "day in smart life" series of short videos on Douyin, vividly showcasing the use of smart home products through lively scenarios and encouraging user interaction through interactive topics. At the same time, Zhiyue Technology has enhanced user participation through online-to-offline integrated interaction. Online, Zhiyue Technology launched a "smart home experience hall" virtual showroom, allowing users to experience the practical use scenarios of smart home products through a mobile application. Offline, Zhiyue Technology held "smart life experience day" events in multiple cities, inviting users to visit smart home experience halls and providing professional technical explanations and product experiences. In addition, Zhiyue Technology established a brand community called "Zhiyue Smart Life Club," where users can exchange smart home usage experiences, share smart life experiences, and participate in online and offline activities organized by the brand. Through these strategies, Zhiyue Technology has achieved high user interaction rates and brand exposure on new media platforms. Data shows that the video playback volume of Zhiyue Technology on Douyin exceeded 1 million times, and user participation increased by 35%. At the same time, Zhiyue Technology's offline activities attracted more than 4,000 users, and user satisfaction and loyalty to the brand have significantly increased.

**Table 3.**

User Interaction Type	Data Metrics and Results
Social Interaction	Video Views: Over 1 million
Social Interaction	Increase in User Engagement: 35%
Offline Interaction	Number of Offline Event Participants: Over 4,000

## 6. Conclusions and Future Outlook

### 6.1 Research Conclusions

This study focuses on the new strategies for brand communication and user interaction in the new media era. Through the analysis of the characteristics of new media platforms, user interaction patterns, and case verification, it concludes that the diversification of new media platforms provides new opportunities for brand communication. Brands need to formulate precise strategies based on platform characteristics and user portraits. Content marketing and storytelling can effectively attract users, while incentive and guidance strategies can enhance user participation. Community operation and omni-channel communication contribute to strengthening user loyalty. The case analysis further confirms the practical effectiveness of these strategies.

### 6.2 Research Limitations and Future Outlook

However, the study mainly focuses on the exploration of traditional media and new media integration strategies, which is insufficient. The in-depth analysis of international brand comparisons is also lacking, and the depth of data collection and analysis needs to be further strengthened. Future research can further explore the application of emerging technologies in brand communication, strengthen the in-depth mining and long-term tracking of user behavior, and expand comparative studies of international brand communication strategies. Looking to the future, brands need to continuously innovate communication strategies and deepen user interaction models to adapt to market changes in the new media environment. Through precision user portraits, personalized content marketing, incentive-based interaction mechanisms, in-depth community operations, and omni-channel communication, brands can achieve more effective communication and user connections in the new media era.

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# A Study on the Usage of the Appellation “Tongzhi” in Contemporary Times

Chunyang Wang<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Zhejiang University of Finance & Economics, Hangzhou, Zhejiang 310018, China

Correspondence: Chunyang Wang, Zhejiang University of Finance & Economics, Hangzhou, Zhejiang 310018, China.

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## Abstract

The term “tongzhi” has undergone evolving semantic and contextual transformations across historical periods. This study employs a combination of questionnaire surveys, interviews, and corpus analysis to investigate the use of “tongzhi” in both real-life oral communication and virtual online interactions. The research reveals that “tongzhi” has become a niche term in contemporary contexts, demonstrating relatively low vitality in practical speech contexts but slightly higher vitality in virtual communication environments. Furthermore, the study utilizes encoding-decoding theory and discourse framework theory to explain the original meanings behind these contextual differences.

**Keywords:** epithet, tongzhi, contemporary, usage

## 1. Introduction

The term “tongzhi” is defined in the *Modern Chinese Dictionary* with two interpretations: ① Individuals who strive for common ideals or causes, specifically referring to members of the same political party; ② A customary mutual address among people.<sup>1</sup> With the proliferation of diverse terms since China’s reform and opening-up, the usage of “tongzhi” has significantly diminished, facing unprecedented neglect. Despite its niche status, this term has undergone semantic evolution in contemporary contexts, no longer strictly corresponding to

dictionary definitions.

Current research on the term “tongzhi” as a proper noun primarily includes: Jia Yanzhu (1997) traced the semantic evolution of “tongzhi,” ultimately highlighting its marginalization in contemporary Chinese society. Xie Zerong (1999) analyzed from a cross-cultural perspective that “tongzhi” in Chinese emphasizes deep camaraderie and inseparable bonds in revolutionary endeavors—a concept absent in Western contexts—ultimately stressing the need for cultural awareness in English teaching. Xu Hui (2012) employed literary examples to demonstrate how the term’s usage underwent three phases during China’s early years, Cultural Revolution, and post-reform era: expanding widely before becoming ceremonial, then

<sup>1</sup> Lexicographical Office of the Institute of Linguistics, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. (eds) (2019). *Modern Chinese Dictionary: 70th Anniversary of the Founding of the People’s Republic of China Collector’s Edition*. 7th edition. Beijing: The Commercial Press, p. 1314.

flourishing in mainstream media and formal meetings while fading from informal interactions. Its pragmatic function evolved from signifying equal communication to representing political identity, ultimately losing its original connotations of trust and solidarity, instead acquiring humorous and entertaining meanings.

The aforementioned studies each demonstrate distinct characteristics. Jia's research focuses on diachronic analysis, revealing that the term "tongzhi" had fallen out of favor by the 1990s. Xie's work emphasizes cultural comparison studies and highlights the importance of cultural export in international education. Xu's comprehensive examination traces the evolution of "tongzhi" as a title across three historical periods, offering analyses of its changing motivations. However, since language evolves over time, these findings fail to capture contemporary developments. Moreover, while Xu's study touches on modern contexts, it primarily analyzes textual examples with only cursory references to real-world usage, thus failing to fully reflect the current practical application of this honorific in oral communication.

Therefore, this study will build upon previous research by employing three methodologies: questionnaire surveys, interviews, and corpus analysis. The research is divided into two phases: Phase I involves data collection and analysis through questionnaires to clearly demonstrate the usage vitality of the term "tongzhi" (excluding non-mainstream connotations like "homosexuality") in real-life communication. This phase will be supplemented with observational data and interview transcripts to examine whether the term's meanings and functions have undergone contemporary transformations. Phase II conducts statistical analysis of online communication platforms (which more closely resemble authentic speech than literary works), aiming to identify distinctive usage patterns of "tongzhi" in virtual spaces and comprehensively map its specific synchronic variations across different contexts.

## 2. Overview and Analysis of the First Stage of Research

### 2.1 Investigation Methods

This research phase integrated three methodologies: covert observation,

questionnaires, and interviews. The covert observation phase was conducted from April to May 2024, serving as a preliminary analysis and data collection for subsequent studies. Observations primarily involved relatives, friends, and individuals of various age groups observable in society. To ensure balanced gender and age distribution among participants, the questionnaire survey commenced in mid-May 2024 using non-random chance sampling. Questionnaires were administered after confirming respondents' ages (primarily through physical appearance, supplemented by preliminary age assessment through casual conversation). Initial observations revealed emerging patterns of "tongzhi" usage among young adults. To comprehensively examine the synchronic usage of this term and determine whether its evolution is influenced by age or social trends, participants were divided into decade cohorts spanning from the 1960s to the 2000s, with equal representation across all age groups. Ultimately, 137 completed questionnaires were collected (65 males and 72 females), with gender distribution as follows:

Men: ≤ 24 years old: 13; 24-35 years old: 15; 36-45 years old: 7; 46-55 years old: 9; 56-65 years old: 11; > 65 years old: 10.

Women: 16 cases were under 24 years old; 20 cases were 24-35 years old; 9 cases were 36-45 years old; 10 cases were 46-55 years old; 9 cases were 56-65 years old; 8 cases were over 65 years old.

Interviews are interspersed with observations and questionnaires to collect as much data as possible and understand the psychology of the users.

In addition, there are four considerations in the design of the questionnaire:

First, modern honorifics exhibit remarkable diversity, with speakers freely adopting various forms of address that vary in usage frequency. Since frequency directly reflects a term's prevalence, the survey specifically examines the usage and frequency of the honorific "tongzhi".

Second, the use of honorifics often varies between urban and rural areas. While "tongzhi" was once a widely used social term with minimal regional differences, does this remain true in contemporary society? Given the high mobility of modern populations, linguistic influences from their place of residence may lead to changes in speech patterns. Therefore,



the questionnaire presents options based on residents' permanent locations.

Thirdly, terms of address are primarily categorized into social and familial types. As families serve as the fundamental units of society, there exists a fluid communication channel between social and familial terms. For instance, familial terms like "uncle" and "auntie" have been widely adopted in social contexts. Based on covert observations during preliminary research, the questionnaire ultimately categorized the contemporary usage of the term "tongzhi" into two domains: family and society.

## 2.2 Investigation Results and Analysis

### 2.2.1 Usage

Among the 137 returned questionnaires, only 14 (10.21%) used the term "tongzhis" in family contexts, indicating its rare usage in modern households. The 14 cases included 5 males (35.71%) and 9 females (64.28%). All users were aged 35 or younger (100%), with 85.71% being students. Non-student groups all had bachelor's degrees or higher (100%), and all had permanent urban residency (100%). Parents (including parents-in-law) were the primary recipients (92.85%), followed by civil servants (64.28%), self-employed individuals (21.42%), and teachers (14.28%).

In the social domain, only 15 instances (10.94% of total) use "tongzhis" as a term of address, indicating its limited popularity and not being the preferred choice among the public. Among these cases, 4 were from male users (26.66%) and 11 from female users (73.33%). The majority (80%) of users were under 35 years old, with some appearing in groups over 56. Students constituted the main user group (73.33%), all of whom had permanent urban residency (100%), and primarily used this term in close-knit peer interactions.

### 2.2.2 Conclusions

As can be seen from the above, the listed conventional factors have different effects on the use of "tongzhis", some of which are obviously effective, while others cannot form an influence. The situation is diverse and needs to be discussed separately. The following is a description:

(1) Gender of the speaker: In family contexts, the gender of the speaker shows no significant influence on whether the term "tongzhi" is used.

However, in social settings: Among those aged 35 and under, women are significantly more likely to use the term "tongzhi" than men; conversely, among those aged 56 and above, the usage pattern is reversed, with all individuals being male.

(2) Age-related factors in usage: Within family contexts, the term "tongzhis" is predominantly used by individuals aged 35 and under, while its use remains uncommon among those over 35. In social settings, age-specific patterns emerge with the term being more frequently employed by groups aged 35-59 and 56+ respectively.

(3) Cultural Literacy of Communicators: The influence of educational background on the use of the term "tongzhi" in family and social contexts interacts with age and occupation, requiring stratified analysis. Specifically: Within family settings, students and individuals under 35 years old use "tongzhi" regardless of educational level; those not in student groups but aged 35 or younger with higher education (bachelor's degree or above) also use it. In social contexts, only highly educated students under 35 adopt "tongzhi"; while those aged 56 and above—due to historical circumstances—typically have higher education levels from junior high or high school. Teachers and workers, with relatively stable and respectable occupations, are more likely to use this term in their age group.

(4) The permanent residence of the speaker: The urban group is the subject of the use of the term "tongzhi".

(5) The working type of the speaker: it interacts with age, educational level and field of use, as seen in the above section on "educational level".

(6) Identity factors of the object of address: In the family domain, the object of address is parents (including parents of spouses) and parents, that is, upward reference and peer reference; in the social domain, people aged 35 and below only use "tongzhis" for acquaintances, while people aged 56 and above do the opposite.

(7) Work Type Factors in Addressing Objects: Within the family domain, whether a speaker uses "tongzhi" largely depends on their age and educational level, as outlined in the "Educational Level" section, rather than the work type of the addressed individual. In social contexts, those aged 35 and under exclusively use "tongzhi" when addressing peers with

similar occupations, while individuals aged 56 and above extend this usage downward to younger groups.

### 2.3 Corpus Analysis

The aforementioned data presents limitations that inevitably raise several questions: First, do the meanings and functions of the term “tongzhi” used by speech subjects across different age groups remain consistent? Could these terms influence each other? Second, does the use of the term “tongzhi” in one context potentially affect its application in another? Addressing these issues requires analysis based on specific linguistic data.

According to the preliminary observation and cross-interview, a total of 32 use cases were obtained. Now they are sorted and merged, and one example of the same type is selected, resulting in the following 14 cases:

#### A. Family sphere:

(1) Lao Xu tongzhi, are you still my good friend? Give me some more money, living expenses! Don't be as stingy as my mother. (Lao Xu refers to the speaker's father, the speaker is a 19-year-old male student)

(2) Tongzhi, I'm not talking about you, but you're over fifty. You have no memory. How can people say that? (The word “tongzhi” refers to the speaker's father. The speaker is a 33-year-old male teacher)

(3) Dad, listen, listen, this is what your Yao tongzhi thinks! Tell me, who's right? (The word “tongzhi” refers to the speaker's mother. The speaker is a 17-year-old girl)

(4) I said, “My dear tongzhi, how can you not be tired of starting a business? I have taken good care of myself. Let's not criticize my big tongzhi, okay?” (The word “tongzhi” refers to the husband of the speaker. The speaker is a 32-year-old female entrepreneur with a bachelor's degree)

(5) You can't say that to Xu tongzhi either. What's wrong with her? Who made your father disobedient? (A dialogue between a husband and his wife. “Tongzhi” refers to the mother of the speaker's husband. The speaker is a 28-year-old female doctor.)

(6) Lao Huo tongzhi in our family is so clever that he doesn't even think about anything related to making money. (“Tongzhi” means the father of the speaker, who is a 33-year-old male

teacher)

#### B. Social domain:

(7) Well, tongzhi, what's wrong with 150 Hospital? (“Tongzhi” refers to the female cleaner. The speaker is a 56-year-old male township teacher)

(8) Tongzhis, would you like to go to the school singing contest tonight? (“Tongzhi” means the speaker's roommate. The speaker is a 20-year-old girl)

(9) Tongzhis, the revolution is not yet finished, we all need to work hard! (“Tongzhis” refers to the speaker's students, the speaker is a 28-year-old middle school teacher)

(10) Tongzhi, I couldn't have done it without you, hehe! (The word “tongzhi” refers to the speaker's boyfriend. The speaker is a female PhD candidate)

(11) I'm also impressed. Why is Du Fu tongzhi so busy these days? He can be found in every painting. (“Du Fu” refers to the Tang Dynasty poet Du Fu, said by a college student)

(12) Then you can't say that either. Xiao Zhao tongzhi's acting is so good that she should be awarded! (“Xiao Zhao tongzhi” refers to actress Zhao Liying, and the speaker is a female college student)

(13) Nowadays, how crazy are the fans like Wu tongzhi? Who dares to break into a prison? (“Tongzhi” refers to the original actor Kris Wu. The speaker is a female college student)

(14) Go take a shower? Lao Meng tongzhi? Borrow the water card, okay? (“Lao Meng tongzhi” refers to the speaker's friend, and the speaker is a male college student)

In the family domain and social domain, the core meaning of the predicate “tongzhi” used to refer to people has not changed, but it is not completely equivalent to the dictionary definition, and its extension meaning and function have changed.

The term “tongzhi” has two main functions in the family domain:

First, establishing equal identities and alliance formations: For instance, in (1), grouping the speaker “I” with the listener “Dad” into the same camp; example (3) involves aligning the listener “Dad” with a third-party neutral party. In (5), the designation of the spouse's mother as “tongzhi” arises from the complex relationships involving the speaker, listener, and absentees.

This terminology not only unites the speaker and absentees but also mitigates potential conflicts between the listener and the natural familial bond formed by the absentees.

Second, the construction of equal identity and the weakening of disrespect: In (2), when the pragmatic environment is negative, the face-asserted father “tongzhi” has the role of constructing equal identity, weakening intergenerational accusations and conflicts, and emphasizing educational warnings.

In social contexts, individuals aged 56 and above predominantly use the term “tongzhis” when addressing strangers (7). This communication pattern serves three primary functions: establishing equal relationships, bridging personal boundaries, and attracting attention to initiate dialogue. For those under 35, the usage of “tongzhis” can be categorized into three distinct contexts:

First, as illustrated in the example (10) (14) (9) (8), the term “tongzhi” refers to different contexts: roommate, student, boyfriend, and friend. This reveals an uncommon detail in the data: unlike the family domain where terms are used with upward and peer references, the social domain employs downward and peer references. Downward references help reduce power gaps, bridge distances, and foster emotional resonance (9). Peer references, meanwhile, maintain general familiarity and convey warmth.

Second, as shown in the example (11), “tongzhi” refers to a historical figure and has a teasing color.

Third, as shown in the example (12) (13), especially in the example (13), “tongzhi” is used to refer to contemporary stars, and the star referred to by “tongzhi” in the example is still a dirty star, which completely contradicts the positive connotation of “tongzhi”. It can be seen that at this time, “tongzhi” also has the function of tacitly referring to the known information between the two parties without praise or criticism.

This reveals that the term “tongzhi” in this context carries dual implications when used as a familiar address. It refers to two aspects: first, the speaker’s perceived familiarity with the person being addressed; Second, the mutual familiarity between the speaker and the interlocutor. These aspects may sometimes merge into one (as seen in the face-to-face

scenario illustrated in (8) (9) (10) (14)), while at other times they remain distinct entities (as demonstrated in the narrative context in (11) (12) (13)).

So far, it can be seen that there are great differences in the meaning and pragmatic purposes of the term “tongzhi” between the two age groups. In addition, the data in the previous article show that the term “tongzhi” used by speech subjects of different ages does not have an infectious relationship.

The corpus analysis reveals distinct contextual variations in the semantic connotations, functional roles, and usage patterns of the term “tongzhi” across different social domains. When examining the spatial distribution of linguistic actors across these domains (as detailed in the original data—though not fully presented in the preceding table), we observe minimal overlap between those using this term in social interactions versus family contexts. The only shared usage occurs among students aged 15-26, including two females and one male. This evidence demonstrates that the use of “tongzhi” maintains a non-overlapping relationship between these domains, meaning the communication patterns observed in one context do not directly influence usage in the other.

However, why does the use of “tongzhi” among speakers of different age groups lack contextual contagion? Why do speakers aged 35 and under exhibit distinct meanings and functions of “tongzhi” in family versus social contexts? Why does the use of the term “tongzhi” in social settings create gender-specific differences among speakers aged 35 and under? Why is the term “tongzhi” exclusively used by speakers aged 56 and above in interactions with strangers within social circles? The code-decode theory provides a compelling explanation for these phenomena.

Fillmore (1992) observed: “The meaning of a word can only be understood when it is situated within a structured context of relevant experiences, beliefs, or habits—this contextual framework constitutes the conceptual prerequisite for comprehending lexical meaning.”<sup>1</sup> While Fillmore specifically addresses how to grasp lexical meaning (i.e.,

<sup>1</sup> Fillmore, C.J. & B. T. S. Atkins. (1992). Toward a frame-based lexicon: The semantics of RISK and its neighbors. In A. Lehrer & E. F. Kittay (eds.) *Frames, fields and contrast: New essays in semantic and lexical organization*. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, pp. 75-102.

establishing that structured contextual background serves as the conceptual prerequisite for linguistic interpretation), it could be argued conversely that the structural background formed by speakers' experiences, beliefs, or habits also constitutes a prerequisite. In other words, the current evolution and uneven development of the term "tongzhi" have been shaped through deconstruction and reconstruction processes influenced by speakers' contextual backgrounds.

The word "tongzhi" has formed the inherent meaning listed in the dictionary. However, all different individuals or different stages of the same individual may be affected by the cultural background and social conditions of the times, so as to deconstruct and reconstruct them again. The group composed of individuals will form the main characteristics of the group due to the joint efforts of individuals.

Through interviews, we have identified two key communication patterns among men aged 35 and under. First, their preference for concise address terms avoids emotional overtones, favoring direct nicknames like "bro" or simple forms of self-reference. The term "tongzhi" is considered too formal and historically charged, typically reserved for specific purposes such as facilitating cooperation, where it carries both respectful and playful undertones. Second, female users of this age group prioritize the "circle" dynamics formed through dormitory and friendship networks. They perceive "tongzhi" as inherently revolutionary and communal, using it to project a bold, unambiguous sense of shared identity. This linguistic evolution reflects how both genders reinterpret the term through cultural lenses: Men selectively adopt its historical and formal connotations to emphasize their outgoing nature, while women prioritize its revolutionary and community-building aspects, redefining it as feminine and dynamic. The use of "tongzhi" exclusively in social interactions among those aged 56 and above stems from three interdependent factors: First, the cultural environment during their youth has subconsciously preserved this address in social contexts. Second, current life experiences (such as acceptance of such terms) have led to adaptive adjustments. Finally, combined with pride from cultural backgrounds and workplace contexts, along with empathetic living environments, this results in "tongzhi" being

used only in downward communication as a sign of respect. Differences in family preferences emerge between speech subjects under 35 and those aged 56+. Younger groups (under 35) increasingly desire family environments characterized by [equality, harmony, and emotional solidarity], while older individuals—particularly rural residents—typically maintain traditional hierarchical lifestyles.

The fundamental reason for the varied transformations of the term "tongzhi" across different contexts and social groups ultimately lies in the qualitative differences between linguistic subjects when selecting deconstruction or reconstruction options. Specifically, one party chooses to reconstruct meanings while the other opts to filter referential objects. As long as communicative purposes are met, cross-group influence becomes unnecessary. Therefore, the contemporary usage of the term "tongzhi" reflects natural formation within respective communities rather than mutual constraints or influences. Moreover, given current practical usage patterns, it is foreseeable that the likelihood of such transformations occurring across different domains and groups remains extremely low.

### 3. The Second Stage of Research Overview and Comparative Analysis

#### 3.1 Description of the Survey Subjects and Corpus Transcription

##### 3.1.1 Subjects of Investigation

Weibo is flooded with government announcements like "Proposed Appointment/Dismissal of tongzhi XX to XX Position" and obituaries such as "tongzhi XX died in the line of duty at age XX." The term "tongzhi" is an officially mandated honorific for government personnel, primarily serving as a polite address equivalent to its definition in the *Modern Chinese Dictionary*. This designation refers specifically to members of the same political party who strive for common ideals and causes, with clearly defined pragmatic purposes and psychological motivations. Therefore, it falls outside the scope of this study.

##### 3.1.2 Corpus Transcription

The corpus was transcribed as authentically as possible, with only missing punctuation added to ensure clarity and maintain textual integrity. For longer source texts, only sections containing



the explicit term “tongzhi” were selected. When emojis appeared in the corpus, WeChat emoticons were replaced with textual annotations using a combination of square brackets and descriptive notes.

### 3.2 Methods and Results of Investigation

Cyber communication represents an extension of real-world verbal interaction into the digital realm. Compared to textual data in literary works, speech patterns on online platforms closely resemble authentic spoken language, forming a vital component of contemporary oral communication. In modern society, Weibo has emerged as a widely used social platform with a massive user base and open nature, making it particularly suitable for linguistic data collection. However, Weibo’s linguistic corpus is characterized by its massive volume and rapid content generation. To investigate the specific synchronic variations of the term “tongzhi” in cyberspace, this study employs periodic quantitative statistical analysis to document its evolving patterns.

This paper uses 25 pieces of corpus containing all the survey conditions on June 10, accounting for 75.75% of the total corpus containing the keyword “tongzhis” on that day, and has a high vitality.

### 3.3 Comparative Analysis

#### 3.3.1 Usage

The term “tongzhi” in Weibo has a variety of referents, which are listed in the following table:

**Table 1.** The referent of “tongzhis” in Weibo

The object of the term “tongzhi”	Quantity	Percentage (total 25)
Parents (below-above)	7	28
Cousinage (lower-upper)	1	4
Spouse (peer)	1	4
Children (top-bottom)	5	20
Grandson/daughter (top-bottom)	1	4
sweethearts	3	12
friend	1	4
doll	1	4
amount to	25	100

As shown in the table, on the Weibo communication platform, “tongzhi” is most commonly used for lower-level references to parents, followed by upper-level references to children, and then peer references between couples. Other reference scenarios account for a relatively small proportion and are nearly equal. The reference objects also differ from real-life communication contexts. The following analysis is conducted based on the corpus data:

(1) In Weibo, “tongzhi” is used to refer to children and grandchildren in the family, and is mostly used for young boys:

① I got up to cook, my son tongzhi goes to school at 5 o’clock, and my mother now makes his own food whenever she is at home, trying to correct it... hahaha ha ha ha ha ha...

② Hahaha, my son tongzhi said that one of the senior students in their school this year was also admitted to Peking University because he won a good ranking in the competition, hahaha!

③ The feeling of the head falling off ~ Pishrimp tongzhi went to bed at 5:30 last night, got up at 2:30... and kept pestering his mother until 4:30 ~ I’m drunk ~ (“tongzhi” refers to the child — still a baby, according to the inquiry, it’s a boy)

④ Five years into our marriage, here’s the ritual sense from Guo Zihe and his little tongzhi [love you]. Year after year, we have you and everyone is safe. With the right person around, year after year [heart] (“tongzhi” refers to his four-or five-year-old son)

⑤ The little baggy baggy tongzhi has been able to turn over very well [laughing] and is getting more and more funny [haha][hehe][cute] (“tongzhi” means speaker’s child — still a baby)

⑥ Every time I open my cigarette case tonight, I think of the note you once stuffed in my case: “Little tongzhi, smoking is not good. Thank you for leaving me a little beauty in my life.” (“Little tongzhi” refers to grandchildren)

(2) In Weibo, “tongzhi” is used to refer to the collateral elders in the family, and the speaker has a deep relationship with the person referred to:

⑦ Lao Meng tongzhi’s love for me is no less than my parents’. I have long wanted to express it. Lao Meng tongzhi is a little shy, but he can’t help it, hahaha! I love Lao Meng!... Weibo has few people, I love you, my aunt!

(3) “tongzhi” in Weibo refers to all users of the



platform and leads to topic discussion:

⑧ # Gaokao [Super Topic] # Tongzhis, what are you doing after the Gaokao? [I love you][I love you][Top][Top][sensitive][sensitive] (“Tongzhis” refers to all users of the platform)

(4) In Weibo, “tongzhi” is used to refer to animals, which contains the meaning of personification, intimacy and seriousness:

⑨ Yimao tongzhi stood ready to prevent Tule Heru from kicking the camp [wink]

(5) In Weibo, “tongzhi” is used to refer to the inorganic body, which contains a sense of rarity and importance:

⑩ My hero mother Chun Chun, whom I miss day and night, brought my baby — Super versatile Yang Meili tongzhi. (“Yang Meili tongzhi” means a doll)

In addition to the above, there are some differences between the use of the predicate “tongzhi” in the microblog communication platform and the actual spoken language, which are not reflected in the data. However, it can be explained by combining specific corpus:

⑪ After being up from 9 o'clock until nearly 1 o'clock in the morning, Doudou finally fell asleep. Xiaoming tongzhi had just come home after drinking. What can I say? It is probably that my mother can really do anything, but my father can not.

The use of “tongzhi” here appears in contexts of accusation and dissatisfaction. Unlike its typical positive connotations in everyday speech, the term lacks the semantic features of [+alliance, intimacy]. By removing the comparison with “tongzhi”, we can see that this usage serves to soften the sharpness of direct name-calling accusations while simultaneously emphasizing and employing irony.

In addition, due to the limitations of conditions, we can only analyze the discourse content. The speech subject who uses “tongzhi” in network communication is concentrated in the youth group.

### 3.3.2 Cause Analysis

Why does the same predicate “tongzhi” have different uses in actual oral communication and network communication? That is, the referent is expanded in the family domain but lacks and supplements in the social domain? The important reason lies in the difference of media.

Verbal behavior refers to the exchange of

information through speech within specific interpersonal contexts.<sup>1</sup> In real-life communication, the use of the term “tongzhi” establishes a “I speak, you listen” relationship where emotional expressions are conveyed directly through verbal sounds without intermediaries. While contemporary Chinese, influenced by Western ideologies, exhibit outgoing personalities and pursue interpersonal equality, the cultural genes of modesty and hierarchical order remain deeply rooted. This manifests in direct speech as a preference for respectful and polite titles, particularly evident in upward communication where hierarchical order is more pronounced.

In online platforms, speech acts inherently involve three parties: “I”, “you”, and “he”. The term “tongzhi” establishes a communicative framework characterized by a “I speak, you listen, he observes” dynamic. Emotional expressions now incorporate textual elements, platform-mediated channels, and interlocutors’ participation, often adopting or even exaggerating expressions that would be avoided in real-life conversations. This intensifies the authenticity, solemnity, and richness of emotional communication. The top-down use of “tongzhi” in online platforms particularly highlights this phenomenon. While these platforms appear open with seemingly unrestricted topic engagement—appearing to disregard familiarity or distance—they implicitly assume audiences will interact with speakers. This mirrors the context of “tongzhi” usage in real-life interactions among acquaintances.

## 4. Conclusion

To sum up, the core meaning of the predicate “tongzhi” used to refer to people has not changed, but it is not completely equivalent to the dictionary definition, and its denotative meaning and function have changed.

In real-life verbal communication, the term “tongzhi” demonstrates limited vitality across different contexts due to age-related factors. Younger groups under 35 are the primary users of this term, with distinct usage patterns: In family settings, “tongzhi” refers to parents and spouses, serving to establish equal relationships, form alliances, and reduce disrespectful

<sup>1</sup> Hu Fanzhu. (2024). The Yuan Subject, Social Identity, and Situational Role: A Reanalysis of the Scope of Speech Subjects. *Journal of Fudan University*, (3).

connotations in educational contexts; when used in social interactions, it can denote friends, celebrities, historical figures, or students, conveying affectionate remarks, playful references, or neutral information sharing without positive or negative connotations. Groups aged 56 and above exclusively use “tongzhi” in downward interactions with strangers, primarily to attract attention and demonstrate respect. The usage patterns of younger groups under 35 remain unaffected by the habits of older groups.

On online social platforms, the term “tongzhi” demonstrates greater vitality than in real-life speech, predominantly used by young people. Within family contexts, it can be applied to parents, collateral relatives, spouses, children (grandchildren), conveying equality and intimacy, and may even carry negative connotations for emphasis or irony. When used outside family circles, it may refer to romantic partners, friends, platform discussion participants, historical figures, animals, or toys, expressing affection and respect. Influenced by media trends, its usage differs from natural speech patterns, particularly through frequent top-down address patterns within family interactions.

However, limited by the author’s level, space and time, there are still many shortcomings and unsolved problems in this paper. For example, the terms must be used by both parties, so the attitude survey of the recipient should be added; the number of survey groups should be expanded, and more data such as corpus should be added. It is expected that this paper can be supplemented and improved in the later stage.

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# Research on Subtitle Translation of Film and Television Works from the Perspective of Cross-Cultural Communication — A Case Study of the Film *Green Book*

Mengxuan Guo<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Xi'an Polytechnic University, Shaanxi, China

Correspondence: Mengxuan Guo, Xi'an Polytechnic University, Shaanxi, China.

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## Abstract

With the continuous progress of media communication technology, cross-cultural communication develops rapidly. Excellent Western film and television works have been introduced into China. The appreciation of other countries' film and television works is one of the most important ways of cultural exchange between countries, and the subtitle translation of films is also rising. Based on the intercultural communication theory, this paper analyzes the subtitle translation of the American film *Green Book*. From the perspective of domestication and foreignization, this paper explores a suitable method for subtitle translation.

**Keywords:** cross-cultural communication, subtitle translation, domestication, foreignization, *Green Book*

## 1. Introduction

With the continuous development of the global economy, exchanges between countries and regions around the world have become increasingly extensive, and films have gradually emerged as a crucial medium for cross-cultural communication. The introduction and exchange of cultures rely on translation, and film subtitle translation holds a significant position in the industry. However, due to constraints in human and material resources, subtitle translation has long failed to receive the attention and in-depth research it deserves from professional translators. How to overcome cultural barriers in the target language and handle cultural

elements in cross-cultural communication has become a core focus of research in the dissemination of Western film and television works.

Since its release, the film *Green Book* has gained immense popularity among audiences worldwide. It not only possesses high ornamental value but also carries substantial cultural significance. Taking *Green Book* as a case study, this paper analyzes the main translation strategies of domestication and foreignization employed in its subtitles. Excellent subtitle translation can accurately convey the information contained in the film, help target-language audiences better understand the

plot, and enable them to obtain a viewing experience that is as close as possible to that of the original-language audiences.

## 2. Research Background and Research Object

### 2.1 Research Background

The further development of globalization has deepened cultural exchanges between China and other countries around the world. As carriers of culture, film and television works play a significant role in the prosperity and development of culture. Subtitle translation serves as a bridge for cross-cultural dialogue. Countless foreign-language films have been introduced into the Chinese market and are deeply loved by the public. They have become a channel for cultural exchange between foreign cultures and Chinese culture. Films have gradually evolved into carriers of national culture and national spirit, and an effective means of shaping national images.

However, the quality of subtitle translation directly affects audiences' understanding and appreciation of films. Among the various factors that influence the quality of subtitle translation, cultural differences have attracted widespread attention from researchers. From the perspective of subtitle translation, how to handle culture-loaded words poses a great challenge for most translators. This is because translators need, on the one hand, to eliminate the barriers caused by cultural differences between the source language and the target language to ensure the readability of the target text, and on the other hand, to convey diverse cultures to the target-language audience. Therefore, studying subtitle translation from a cross-cultural perspective is of great significance for further promoting international cultural exchanges.

Cross-cultural Communication refers to the cultural exchange activities between native speakers and non-native speakers, and also denotes any communicative interactions among people who differ in terms of their linguistic and cultural backgrounds (Yuan Xinyu, 2015). To analyze a phenomenon from a cross-cultural perspective means to examine the characteristics of various cultures involved in that phenomenon, thereby promoting the acceptance and adaptation between different cultures (Ye Lei, 2022). When translating film subtitles, due to the influence of cross-cultural factors, translators need to adopt different translation strategies. For instance, domestication and

foreignization are commonly used translation strategies. Proposed by Lawrence Venuti (2012), an American translation theorist, these two strategies manifest not only at the linguistic level but also in the handling of cultural elements.

The domestication strategy requires translators to get as close as possible to target-language readers and adopt expressions familiar to them, while the foreignization strategy operates in the opposite way. In subtitle translation, domestication and foreignization play a vital role—they are interdependent and complementary to each other. Similarly, in film subtitle translation, these two strategies serve as a link for cultural communication. Admittedly, translation methods are flexible and diverse, and translators often employ them in a highly flexible manner during film subtitle translation. Since both domestication and foreignization have their own advantages and disadvantages in translation practice, translators are required to apply them flexibly according to the requirements, purposes of translation and types of data, so as to achieve the unity and balance of these two strategies.

### 2.2 Research Object

Research on subtitle translation undoubtedly proceeds in tandem with the internationalization of the film and television cultural industry. As an increasing number of foreign film and television works pour into China and gain popularity among Chinese audiences, the necessity of subtitle translation research has become increasingly evident. In China, Qian Shaochang (2000), a renowned translator, pointed out that the language used in film and television contains elements of ordinary language while also possessing its own distinctive features. Different scholars have conducted studies on the various characteristics of subtitle translation. From the author's perspective, subtitle translation exhibits the following features:

(1) Colloquialism: Film and television dramas are primarily plot-driven, with the plot advanced through interactions between characters. For the purpose of entertainment, it is unlikely for obscure, awkward, or overly professional expressions to be used in films. Dialogue serves as the most important and commonly employed form of interaction. Sentences in dialogue are usually not excessively long, preventing audiences from lacking



sufficient time to comprehend the content while viewing the visual scenes of the film or television work.

(2) Vividness: With the improvement of people's living standards, individuals have access to a wider range of entertainment activities and news. Unlike other literary works, films convey characters' personalities, inner worlds, and the plot through a combination of language, music, images, gestures, and other media. All these elements are closely related to the quality and popularity of a film. Therefore, the language used in films should be vivid and engaging, so as to fully convey the plot content and the distinctive traits of the characters.

The film *Green Book* is an American movie released in 2018. It won the Academy Awards for Best Picture, Best Supporting Actor, and Best Original Screenplay in 2019. Set in New York in the 20th century, the film tells the story of Tony, who, out of financial necessity, takes a job working for Dr. Shirley—driving and accompanying the pianist Dr. Shirley on a concert tour as they travel south. Beyond depicting a series of events that unfold during their southern journey, the film also portrays the friendship that develops between two individuals from vastly different life circumstances.

Analyzing the linguistic and cultural uniqueness of the film's subtitles from a cross-cultural perspective helps reduce the cultural barriers audiences may encounter while watching the film, thereby achieving the goal of cross-cultural dialogue. This paper explores the difficulties and challenges in subtitle translation, and summarizes the strategies and techniques applied in the subtitle translation of *Green Book* from a cross-cultural standpoint, with the aim of providing valuable insights for the research on subtitle translation between Chinese and foreign films.

### 3. The Reflect of Cross-Cultural Communication in Subtitle Translation

Translation serves as the cornerstone and primary medium of cross-cultural communication. Against the backdrop of globalization, translation can transcend language barriers, enabling people from diverse cultural backgrounds to understand and communicate with one another. It plays a "bridge" role in various fields such as business exchanges, academic cooperation, and cultural

dissemination. (Guo Ting & Wang Yunjiang, 2025) Cultural translation plays a vital role in enhancing local identity and facilitating cross-cultural understanding (Panornuang Sudasna Na Ayudhya, 2025). Subtitle translation serves as a channel for cultural exchange within the context of cross-cultural communication, and its functions mainly fall into the following two aspects: (1) It can convey more abundant information to audiences, helping them better understand the plot content. (2) It enables deaf-mute people and those with hearing impairments to comprehend the content of the film. Although subtitle translation is a relatively new field, it still cannot be divorced from the constraints of culture in the specific translation process.

For example, in the film *Green Book*, the line "Of course, I don't want you to miss the show, you ungrateful bastard!" is translated as "我当然不想你错过演出,你这个白眼狼!". Instead of being literally translated as "卑鄙小人" (a vile person), the word "bastard" in the original text is replaced by "白眼狼", a term with distinct Chinese cultural characteristics. In Chinese, "白眼狼" refers to an ungrateful person, which is highly consistent with the original meaning of "bastard". However, the term "白眼狼" is more idiomatic and carries unique Chinese linguistic features, taking into account the audience's level of understanding and appreciation.

This translation method is well-aligned with the cognitive habits of Chinese audiences, instantly narrowing the distance between the audience and the film. At the same time, it allows the audience to accurately perceive Tony's feelings of anger mixed with helplessness at that moment, effectively conveying the film's plot and ensuring the plot remains tight and coherent.

### 4. Research on the Subtitle Translation Strategies of the Film *Green Book* from the Perspective of Cross-Cultural Communication

#### 4.1 Domestication

According to Venuti's view, domestication is "a translation strategy that employs a transparent and fluent style to minimize the sense of strangeness for target readers." Domestication prioritizes readers of the target language, adopting expression methods familiar to them to convey the content of the original text, ensuring that both the content and form of the translation fall within the scope of the readers' cognitive



understanding of the real world (Zhang Chenxiang, 2006). Applying the domestication strategy in subtitle translation can not only effectively help target-language audiences understand the film's plot but also make the audience feel a strong sense of familiarity and affinity.

**ST:** "I'm just good at talking people into, you know, doing things they don't wanna do. By bullshit them."

**TT:** "你懂的, 我就是擅长说服别人, 让他们做他们不想做的事。用我的三寸不烂之舌。"

Literally, "By bullshit them" would be translated as "靠哄骗他们". However, "三寸不烂之舌" is a Chinese idiom originating from Records of the Grand Historian: Biography of Lord Pingyuan and Yu. It describes someone who is eloquent and skilled in speech. Instead of translating "By bullshit them" literally, the translator fully took into account the linguistic habits of Chinese audiences and adopted a domestication approach to the original text. This translation not only conforms to the reading habits and cultural preferences of Chinese people, helping them better understand the original meaning, but also perfectly captures the protagonist Tony's carefree and quick-witted personality traits. It also plays a positive role in helping Chinese audiences immerse themselves in the film's context.

**ST:** "Nice turn Mike, what he makes it up?"

**TT:** "走得好, 他嚼啥舌根了?"

This line is spoken by Tony. "嚼舌根" is a Northern Chinese dialect term, meaning to spread rumors or talk nonsense. During a rest stop, Tony picked up a stone that had fallen on the ground near a stall; a member of the accompanying band witnessed this and quietly walked over to the car to tell Don, which prompted Tony to say this line. The original meaning of "make up" here is "to fabricate". The translator handled this cleverly by adopting the domestication strategy and translating it as "嚼舌根". This not only conveys Tony's sense of displeasure but also faithfully communicates the original content in an expression familiar to Chinese audiences, narrowing the distance with Chinese viewers while enhancing the readability of the translation.

**ST:** "Hey, hey fancy-pants, you wanna play."

**TT:** "靓仔, 你要一起玩吗。"

This line is spoken by a Black local resident to

Dr. Shirley after Tony drops Dr. Shirley off at his accommodation as directed by the *Green Book*. The term "fancy-pants" refers to someone who puts on airs or a man who is overly effeminate. On the other hand, "靓仔" is a Cantonese dialect term, originally meaning "good-looking guy" or "handsome young man"; in current practical use, it is also used to address unfamiliar men in a casual manner. In the context of this film scene, the Black local residents are portrayed as down-to-earth characters. Therefore, translating "fancy-pants" as "靓仔" here is more in line with Chinese expression habits and also makes it easier for target-language readers to understand the context.

#### 4.2 Foreignization

The foreignization strategy in film subtitle translation can not only accurately convey the plot content of the film, but also prompt the audience to receive a cultural edification from a foreign land (Wan Li, 2021).

Foreignization requires respecting the existence of cultural differences, thereby preserving to the greatest extent the linguistic style and cultural characteristics embodied in the source text. To a certain extent, it aims to maintain the original expression of content, allowing the audience to perceive the existence of cultural differences while still successfully grasping the profound meaning within (Li Bo, 2022). Although subtitle translation is subject to numerous constraints—being unable to elaborate on or explain such distinctive cultural elements within limited time and space, and the audience also lacking sufficient time to infer and ponder over the profound meaning—subtitles translated through the foreignization approach can still retain the wonderful artistic conception and cultural uniqueness of the source text to the maximum degree.

**ST:** "From thy bounty, through Christ our Lord, Amen."

**TT:** "主啊, 感谢您的慷慨, 阿门。"

This line is spoken during a family dinner at Tony's home. In some Western countries, families often say such a phrase before meals to express gratitude for the food they are about to eat. Guided by the Skopos Theory, the translator adopted the foreignization strategy and translated it as "主啊" (Lord). This translation not only avoids difficulties in audience comprehension but also fits perfectly with the current context, making it highly appropriate. It

not only faithfully renders the original text (thus fulfilling the principle of faithfulness) but also helps Chinese audiences gain an understanding of foreign culture.

**ST:** “Tony, the first thing I’d like you to do, when we arrive in the city, is check the piano where I’m playing, make sure it’s a Steinway as per my contract.”

**TT:** “托尼，我们到目的地后，你第一件事就是检查我要去弹的那台钢琴，按照合同规定，必须是斯坦威牌的。”

In the film, Dr. Shirley is a renowned Black pianist with an outstanding pursuit of art, so he only plays the finest pianos. During that era, the best pianos were those of the Steinway brand. Therefore, Dr. Shirley instructs Tony to check whether the piano provided is a Steinway before each performance, as he aims to deliver the most perfect show. Instead of catering to the audience by translating “Steinway” as “a type of piano brand”, the translator adopted the foreignization strategy and rendered “Steinway” into “斯坦威” through transliteration. This translation choice is justified because the context of the sentence already makes it clear that “Steinway” refers to a piano brand, so such a translation does not cause comprehension difficulties for the audience. Furthermore, this foreignized translation also helps to expand the audience’s knowledge.

**ST:** “Tony: You know, when you first hired me, my wife went out bought one of your records, one about the orphans.

Don: Orphans?

Tony: Yeah. Cover had a bunch of kids sitting around a camp-fire?

Don: Orpheus. Orpheus in the Underworld. It’s based on a French Opera. And those weren’t children on the cover. Those were demon in the bowels of hell.”

**TT:** “托尼：其实你最开始雇佣我的时候，我老婆买了一张你的关于孤儿的唱片。

唐：孤儿？

托尼：对，封面上有一群小孩坐在篝火边。

唐：那是奥菲斯（发音类似 orphans），《地狱中的奥菲斯》（奥菲斯是希腊神话中阿波罗与缪斯之子、传奇音乐家）根据法国歌剧创作的。而且封面上也不是小孩，都是地狱里的恶魔。”

Tony mistakes “Orpheus” in Don’s work Orpheus in the Underworld for “orphans”—a word similar in pronunciation—which could

lead to unnecessary misunderstandings among the audience. Here, the translator addresses this by explaining the similar pronunciations of “Orpheus” and “orphans” while also providing a brief introduction to the origin of Orpheus. This approach not only converts the content into the target language but also remains faithful to the original text. It enables target-language audiences to understand the culture of the source language, thereby promoting cultural exchange and dissemination.

## 5. Conclusion

Film subtitle translation is an inevitable demand driven by economic and social development. As a crucial means of artistic and cultural dissemination, subtitle translation must always serve target-language audiences. An excellent translator acts as a bridge between the target language and the audience, and a communicator who facilitates cultural exchanges among countries.

Therefore, in film subtitle translation, the principle of “seeking common ground while reserving differences” should be adhered to. Translators must not only consider the acceptance ability of target-language audiences but also fully convey the linguistic and cultural information contained in the original film. They should align with the characteristics and features of the film work to select subtitle translation strategies that match the film’s character traits and plot.

When translating the original text, the cultural information contained in the source language should be integrated with the translation according to the characteristics of the translated language environment and the audience (Zuo Chunmeng, 2024). An analysis of the subtitle translation of *Green Book* reveals that when translating subtitles for foreign films, the decision to adopt domestication or foreignization depends on specific contexts. When the language used in a film carries unique cultural connotations—for instance, when character dialogues contain cultural terms unfamiliar to the audience, or when certain expressions may be deemed incomprehensible—translators can opt for a strategy that ensures accessibility. In such cases, the domestication strategy is recommended.

For terms with cultural implications appearing in the film, if the goal is to help the audience understand foreign cultures, it is advisable for

translators to adopt the foreignization strategy in practical translation. Employing appropriate domestication or foreignization strategies to convey all linguistic elements of the characters enables the audience to feel a sense of empathy and willingness to accept the content. While explaining cultural contexts, translators can preserve the original cultural characteristics, allowing the audience to find common ground with their own culture and achieve emotional resonance.

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# An Analysis of Content Operation Modes of Audio Platforms in the Digital Age—A Case Study of Ximalaya FM

Shurui Liu<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> School of Journalism and New Media, Xi'an Jiaotong University, Shaanxi, China

Correspondence: Shurui Liu, School of Journalism and New Media, Xi'an Jiaotong University, Shaanxi, China. Email: lsr331127@stu.xjtu.edu.cn

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## Abstract

Taking Ximalaya FM as an example, this paper explores the content operation modes of audio platforms in the digital age. By analyzing the platform overview, content production and communication operation modes of Ximalaya FM, it reveals its innovative practices in diversified content, personalized recommendation, AIGC production mode, community interaction and commercialization paths. The study finds that Ximalaya FM has successfully enhanced user stickiness and brand influence through the diversified content production modes of UGC, PGC and PUGC, combined with data-driven optimization strategies and cross-border cooperation. However, the platform still faces problems such as content homogenization, review dilemmas and single interaction forms. In response to these issues, this paper puts forward suggestions such as strengthening the review mechanism, cultivating high-quality anchors and enriching interaction functions, in order to provide reference for the sustainable development of audio platforms.

**Keywords:** Ximalaya FM, audio platform, content operation, AIGC, personalized recommendation, community interaction, commercialization mode

## 1. Introduction

With the popularization of smartphones and mobile Internet, audiobook platforms have begun to attract increasing attention and recognition from users. Globally, the scale of the audiobook market is constantly expanding, with the number of users and revenue growing steadily. Audiobook apps are a new type of reading medium that provides audio-based book listening through mobile smart terminals.

Audiobooks originated in the West. In the

history of publishing in China, they can be traced back to “storytelling” during the Spring and Autumn and Warring States periods. Although there were no carriers to record it, which cannot be defined as audiobooks, it can be regarded as the predecessor of Chinese audiobooks. In China, the real sense of audiobooks first appeared in the 1990s. With the iteration of media carriers, audiobooks have gone through three development stages: from electronic players to PC terminals of websites, and then to mobile terminals.

As digital media technology continues to evolve, the audio content of Ximalaya FM has become increasingly diversified. By the first half of 2021, Ximalaya FM had accumulated more than 290 million audio content items, covering 98 categories, meeting the needs of different user groups. In the audiobook section, the types of content are also more abundant and diverse, including children's stories, novels, history, humanities, storytelling, business, health and other types. Ximalaya FM has accumulated a large amount of high-quality content, providing users with a rich and varied selection.

In terms of activities, Ximalaya FM has been very active in brand communication by holding various events. As early as 2015, Ximalaya FM successfully made a name for itself by holding the "New Sound Life — 2015 Ximalaya Conference". Later, during the 2016 Shanghai Book Fair, Ximalaya FM's million audiobook contents became a highlight of the exhibition. In the same year, Ximalaya FM announced the first "123 Knowledge Carnival", which not only promoted the dissemination of audio content but also accelerated the development of paid knowledge. In addition, during World Book Day, Ximalaya FM also launched the "423 Audiobook Festival", which not only established its brand image in the audiobook market but also expanded the scale of its user groups. Through these activities, Ximalaya FM has successfully enhanced its brand awareness and attracted more users' attention. Since its establishment, Ximalaya has experienced rapid development and continuous innovation. By introducing paid subscription models, expanding user scale, international expansion and diversified content development, Ximalaya has become one of the most popular and well-known audio sharing platforms in China, and has gradually emerged in the international market.

## **2. Technology Empowerment and Ecological Reconstruction: Diversity in Ximalaya's Content Production**

The Ximalaya platform offers a rich and diverse range of audio content, covering various fields and themes such as audiobooks, radio dramas, music, education, entertainment, and news. Users can choose and listen to various contents according to their interests. Since its launch, Ximalaya FM has focused on expanding content types to meet the needs of different audiences and gain a larger share in the market. Based on

observations of Ximalaya FM's audiobook section and rankings, the content types of audiobooks can be roughly divided into children's, two-dimensional, personal growth, radio dramas, history, humanities, business and finance, storytelling, novels, IT technology, health and wellness, etc. These types include not only popular novels and humanities content that meet the needs of most users but also niche program types such as two-dimensional and IT technology, which target specific groups of people.

### *2.1 Rich Content Sources Attract a Wide Range of Users*

In terms of audiobook content, compared with the same period of the previous year, Ximalaya FM saw a 63.56% growth in audio reading content in 2020, showing a strong momentum of development. Ximalaya FM has reached strategic cooperation with online literature websites such as China Reading Limited, involving audio adaptation of literary works and IP derivative development, thus gaining a huge resource of audio adaptations of online literature. Its market share in audiobook copyrights has also reached 70%. Classic works such as *Journey to the West* and *To Live* are popular among young users. Many parents choose to play children's audiobooks to protect their children's eyesight. Nowadays, the production of children's radio dramas is becoming more and more sophisticated, with high-quality plots and rich interpretations making children fall in love with reading. In addition, through cross-border cooperation, traditional culture and classic literature have been inherited and disseminated in the form of audiobooks. For example, the online novel *Battle Through the Heavens* interpreted in the style of storytelling, and the radio drama version of *A Dream of Red Mansions* re-interpreted by young voice actors, with their vivid and easy-to-understand expressions, have promoted the dissemination of classic sinology.

### *2.2 AI Creation Technology Encourages Users to Use and Publish Works*

In data collation, the sources of audiobook content are classified according to the content producers: content created by ordinary users is categorized as UGC; content produced by professionals such as celebrities, scholars, industry elites, and independent studios, including content self-produced by Ximalaya's



official platform, is classified as PGC; and content provided and produced by anchors signed with Ximalaya FM is defined as PUGC. Among 339 albums, 151 belong to PGC content, accounting for the highest proportion of 44.5%. Followed by UGC albums, totaling 102, accounting for 30.1%. PUGC content is the least, with 86 items, accounting for 25.4%.

Supported by the above new technological background, users' enthusiasm has been greatly stimulated, enabling them to better participate in content creation. On the Ximalaya FM platform, a large number of audiobook enthusiasts have actively responded to the slogan "Everyone can be an anchor". As long as they pass real-name authentication, they can use the tools and upload interfaces provided by the platform to produce and publish their own audiobook works. The audiobook anchor "You Sheng De Zijin" (Voice of Zijin) initially released his recorded ghost stories on Ximalaya FM, gradually gaining popularity and becoming a hit on the platform. From the perspective of spatial scenarios, different locations can trigger different emotional needs. Ximalaya FM has a variety of audiobook content that can adapt to various spatial scenarios. For example, in the bathroom in the early morning, it is suitable to listen to news; during commuting or in private cars, storytelling and light knowledge and entertainment content are more appropriate; while in bed at home, audiobooks on personal growth, humanities, and history are ideal. Ximalaya FM will push corresponding content according to the scenario to reach the target audience more accurately.

### 3. Collaboration Between Producers and Consumers in the Platform Society: Analysis of Ximalaya FM's Content Production Model

With the expansion of audio program content scale and the increase in user numbers, audiobook platforms are faced with the pressure of not only providing a sufficient number of audio programs to meet the browsing needs of the audience but also offering high-quality content to attract them to use the app for a long time. As a result, the pressure they bear has been increasing over time. Ximalaya has provided content producers with more convenient production tools: AIGC. AI, leveraging its understanding, imagination, and creativity, can create various contents such as articles, short stories, reports, music, images, and videos according to specified needs and styles. The

emergence of AIGC has opened up a brand-new creative world, offering countless possibilities to people. Producers can use AIGC to quickly produce the content they want, greatly reducing time costs and improving production efficiency.

At present, the problem of content homogenization is almost a "severe disaster area" for the entire audio industry. Content homogenization has become a common phenomenon in the industry, and the content and forms of various platforms, both internally and externally, maintain a certain degree of uniformity. For example, many producers, in the process of using AIGC for intelligent production, will inevitably use the same audio or video templates, thus creating a sense of "sameness" or "deja vu" for the audience. Moreover, when compared horizontally with other audio platforms, it will be found that the content sections of Ximalaya FM, such as children's, anchor radio, and humanities, are quite similar to those of other audio platforms, no longer having uniqueness, which easily causes users to experience aesthetic fatigue.

Therefore, Ximalaya FM has adopted personalized data streaming and tries to push content that users have never browsed or listened to before. It judges whether users are interested in the content by detecting the duration of their browsing and the frequency of their searching for the content in the background, so as to decide whether to push the content to them. Continuously carrying out this operation can continuously explore users' interest points, thereby reducing user loss.

"You Sheng De Zijin" has become one of the top anchors on Ximalaya by virtue of the high-quality audio content he created. The cumulative playback volume of his work *Mo Jin Tian Shi* has reached 7.58 billion times, and the number of members in his "circle" has reached 310,000, with the total number of posts exceeding 30,000. In the circle, users will exchange views and opinions on the stories and characters in his audiobooks, and sometimes express doubts. Other users will also interact through likes, comments, and reposts. The anchor himself will also interact with users in the circle, showing part of his daily life, which shortens the psychological distance with users.

### 4. Mediated Communication: Community Interaction and Scene-Based Distribution Mechanism of Ximalaya FM

As China's largest audio platform, Ximalaya not only provides rich audio content covering multiple fields such as novels, crosstalk, parenting, education, and finance but also adopts a professional content distribution model, with professionally generated content (PGC) and user-generated content (UGC) as its main operational methods. It aims to become a leader in the construction and operation of online audio sharing platforms and is even hailed as the "YouTube of the audio field". Ximalaya's content communication strategy is mainly based on user operation and membership operation. Firstly, since most users are highly focused when listening to audio content, it provides diverse scene value for the dissemination of audio-stream advertisements. At the same time, Ximalaya also offers users the service of purchasing memberships to obtain a better audio experience and ad-free access. In addition, it attracts users to download and use its app through innovative communication activities, such as sharing and disseminating via IP.

The communication process of Ximalaya mainly includes content production, content review, content distribution, and user stickiness. In the content production link, Ximalaya encourages originality and supports users to upload their own audio content; in the content review link, the platform reviews all uploaded content to ensure its compliance; in the content distribution link, Ximalaya pushes relevant content to users through recommendation algorithms based on their interests and behaviors. Moreover, the user stickiness of the product not only reflects the quality of user experience but also is an important indicator of communication effectiveness.

#### 4.1 Community-Based Communication Through Interactive Functions

Community-based communication is a communication model centered on content and linked by social relationships. In this model, every member plays the role of producer, disseminator, and consumer of content products. This interactive communication method enables consumers to no longer be merely recipients of information but also disseminators of it. As an audio-sharing platform, Ximalaya's community-based communication strategy is mainly reflected in its "Circle" function. Users can make friends and chat in the circles to meet their social needs, and

at the same time, participate in various topic discussions created by influential anchors, which enhances community activity. This form of interaction not only helps improve user retention but also strengthens the connection between anchors and their fans.

Ximalaya has utilized the celebrity effect in content communication to accelerate the spread and improve the quality of communication. Firstly, Ximalaya invites well-known stars and experts to produce and share audio content on its platform, such as Ma Dong, Tsai Kang-yung, and Gao Xiaosong. The participation of these celebrities not only enriches the platform's content supply but also attracts their fan bases to become Ximalaya users. Secondly, Ximalaya holds various activities such as "National Recitation" and "Karaoke Competition" to provide users with opportunities to interact with celebrities, thereby increasing user participation and stickiness. For example, Ximalaya once held a "Sound Festival" and invited many music celebrities including Jay Chou and G.E.M. Deng Ziqi, which attracted a large number of users' attention and participation.

The Audiobook Library project is jointly launched by China Post and Ximalaya. It utilizes Ximalaya's massive audio content to create an atmosphere similar to that of a traditional library, providing a vast amount of electronic audiobooks, audio magazines, and other resources. Moreover, Ximalaya's Audiobook Library is a digital audio reading product developed in response to the national "National Reading" strategy, aiming to help the whole society foster a civilized atmosphere of "loving reading, reading good books, and reading wisely" and build a learning-oriented society. To strengthen consumers' memory of the brand's highlights, Ximalaya has also stepped into more offline scenarios by creating offline pop-up stores around the product feature of "audiobooks". At the same time, Ximalaya has cooperated with libraries to launch a series of online activities, including audiobook promotions and lectures by famous scholars, further expanding its brand influence and attracting more users to participate.

In terms of community-based communication, Ximalaya has adopted a variety of strategies. Firstly, in community building, Ximalaya has established paid course communities, allowing members to communicate directly with experts, thereby increasing user stickiness and retention.

Secondly, in constructing a user growth system, the platform sets both quickly achievable tasks and long-term tasks for users in the membership level system, attracting users to stay through rewards. Thirdly, circle-based marketing methods promote communication: Ximalaya continues to explore circle-based communication methods, using more targeted channels, gameplay, and content to help brands leverage circles and achieve efficient communication. Finally, in cross-border cooperation, for example, Ximalaya has collaborated with China Mobile to create an immersive parallel universe experience through sound, and even formed in-depth cooperation with Spacety, one of China's first commercial aerospace companies, to build a space-themed radio station — "Cosmic Radio", further expanding the scope and influence of its community-based communication.

#### *4.2 Expanding Communication Effects Through Social Media*

Ximalaya has been active in cooperating with social media, establishing partnerships with multiple platforms. For instance, it has collaborated with video platforms such as iQiyi and Tencent to promote its audio content to a broader user base. Moreover, Ximalaya attaches great importance to cooperation with original audio content creators and anchors, providing them with partial platform traffic support to encourage and drive the creation and dissemination of more high-quality audio programs. At the same time, Ximalaya has also built solid and long-term cooperative relationships with numerous online platforms and publishers, which helps enrich the content resources of its platform and provide users with a diversified auditory experience. At the commercial level, Ximalaya's cooperation with different social media has also achieved remarkable results. For example, it has launched activities such as bundled sales of VIP memberships, or giving out coupons or vouchers. These initiatives not only can enhance users' purchase willingness but also help boost its revenue.

#### *4.3 Cross-Border Cooperation to Enhance Communication Influence*

Cross-border cooperation plays a multifaceted role in the communication process. Ximalaya's cross-border collaborations have exerted a significant impact in boosting its influence,

mainly reflected in the following aspects: Firstly, it has elevated the visibility and influence of Ximalaya itself as well as other collaborating brands. Ximalaya has carried out cross-border cooperation with leading brands in various industries, such as domestic brands like Pianzaihuang and Jiaduobao, as well as JD Supermarket, Penguin Random House North Asia, Strait Publishing & Distribution Group, and Jiangsu Phoenix Publishing & Media Co., Ltd. These collaborations have not only raised Ximalaya's brand awareness but also strengthened its influence in different fields. Secondly, it can deepen user understanding and increase user stickiness. Through cross-border cooperation, Ximalaya can gain a deeper insight into the needs and psychology of target users, thereby providing products and services that better meet their demands.

### **5. Operational Tensions of Digital Audio Platforms: Content Alienation and Crisis of Community Stickiness**

At present, the issue of content homogenization is almost a "severe hit zone" in the audio and video industry. Content homogeneity has become a common phenomenon across the industry, with various platforms maintaining a certain degree of uniformity in both their internal and external content as well as forms. Audiobook platforms suffer from content homogenization, resulting in low legibility and high substitutability of content among different platforms. To save production costs and reduce investment risks, some platforms convert purchased radio resources or TV videos into audio formats; popular works are broadcast on multiple platforms, which easily leads to user loss. In terms of audiobook production, supported by technology, the threshold for audio production has been continuously lowered, making the produced content highly homogeneous and replicable. In terms of platform characteristics, comprehensive audiobook platforms have similar content classifications and largely identical functions. Taking Ximalaya FM as an example, its content is roughly divided into popular channels, anchor radio, children's, humanities, etc., which are almost the same as those on other similar apps, lacking uniqueness. This easily causes users to experience auditory aesthetic fatigue and reduces the platform's profit conversion rate.

#### *5.1 Gatekeeping Dilemmas Undermine Content*

### *Quality*

In the digital media ecosystem, audio content poses unique governance challenges due to its distinct media attributes. Compared with visualized media forms such as video and text, the non-visual nature of audio creates fundamental obstacles for censorship. The abstract nature of sound information makes it difficult for machine review to accurately identify semantics, emotional tendencies, and potential violating content. Meanwhile, manual review is inefficient due to the linear transmission characteristic of audio (requiring real-time listening to the entire content), resulting in a conflict between technical efficiency and review accuracy. The openness of the Internet further amplifies this dilemma. Audio platforms attract a large number of UGC creators through low-threshold strategies, which enriches the content ecosystem but also leads to uneven quality of works. Improvised expressions in talk shows and music programs often risk topic drift; some anchors deliberately create controversial content to attract traffic, or even turn to vulgar expressions. Due to the sequential nature of audio, such content is often detected only after being broadcast, and delayed review allows violating content to exert its communicative impact.

Copyright issues constitute another structural contradiction. Audio creation inherently relies on the quotation and re-creation of sound materials, but current platforms' copyright identification technology is still limited to simple sound fingerprint matching, struggling to handle complex scenarios such as mixed editing and adaptation. Music programs frequently get involved in copyright disputes over the use of background music, while knowledge-sharing content faces legal controversies over the legitimacy of quoted viewpoints. This tension between creative freedom and copyright constraints forces anchors to carefully balance during content production, objectively limiting the expansion of creative space. What is more noteworthy is the deep-seated conflict between the scenario-accompanying trait of audio media and the needs of censorship. Users usually consume audio in fragmented scenarios such as mobile states and background playback. To maintain the fluency of user experience, platforms often streamline the review process, leading to loosened control over content quality. This

contradiction between instant dissemination and prudent review reveals the difficult balance digital audio platforms must strike among technology, law, and user experience.

### *5.2 Single Form Weakens Interaction Effect*

From the perspective of media ontology, the temporal and spatial characteristics of audio media profoundly shape users' interaction behavior patterns. As a typical linear communication medium, audio content features an irreversible time flow. This materiality of the medium leads users to form a one-way information reception inertia during listening. Compared with the interactive features of video or graphic media that allow pausing and replaying at any time, the "fleeting" nature of audio content objectively hinders the occurrence of real-time interactive behaviors. At the platform design level, existing interaction mechanisms have significant structural flaws. Firstly, there is the problem of visual occlusion in interface design: interactive function entrances are often placed on secondary pages or edge positions, which does not conform to the core interaction logic of digital products. Secondly, interaction forms show a tendency of simplification, overly relying on traditional text comment modes, and failing to fully develop innovative forms adapted to audio media characteristics, such as voice interaction and real-time bullet screens. More critically, platforms have not established an effective feedback loop system, and users' interaction behaviors lack an immediately visible reward mechanism, leading to a continuous decline in participation motivation.

In terms of community maintenance, audio platforms face the dilemma of weakened emotional connection. Although attempts are made to build virtual communities through functions like "circles", the lack of effective online-offline linkage mechanisms makes it difficult to establish stable social connections between anchors and audiences. Existing interactions mostly remain at the level of shallow communication on content, failing to reach the level of identity recognition and emotional resonance. These structural dilemmas reflect the fundamental tension between media characteristics and social functions in audio platforms. To break through this predicament, it is necessary to reconstruct the interaction paradigm based on the materiality of the medium, rather than simply transplanting social



models from other platforms. Potential future development directions may include: developing voice-based asynchronous interaction systems, building scenario-adaptive lightweight interaction interfaces, and establishing a content-social dual-helix incentive mechanism. This requires platform operators to fundamentally rethink the social possibilities of audio media, rather than staying at the level of technical superficial function superimposed.

### 5.3 Communication-Reception Model Reduces Community Stickiness

There is an inherent contradiction between the linear transmission characteristics of audio media and the needs of community interaction. As a typical non-intrusive medium, the one-way output nature of audio content inherently places users in a passive receiving state during listening. This communication model makes it difficult to form an immediate and equal dialogue between listeners and anchors; the diverse symbolic exchanges relied upon by community interaction are reduced to simple text comments. More critically, the time-flow characteristic of audio content disrupts the synchronic experience among community members, resulting in fragmented and asynchronous interactions that severely weaken the sense of collective presence essential to virtual communities. After an anchor's voice, as an emotional carrier, completes its transmission, listeners' feedback often remains at the textual level. The emotional loss in this process of symbolic conversion further weakens the strength of connections.

Current community operations on audio platforms face dual dilemmas: At the content level, the premiumization strategy squeezes the living space of UGC. While professionally produced content (PGC) has improved content quality, it has objectively created a strict divide between "anchors and listeners", suppressing ordinary users' creative willingness and participation enthusiasm. In terms of interaction mechanisms, over-reliance on comment functions reveals a lack of innovation. Anchors' passive attitude toward replying to comments sets a negative example, and platforms have failed to establish an effective incentive feedback system, trapping interactions in a "low participation-low feedback" vicious cycle. What is more worthy of reflection is that existing community functions are often directly transplanted from graphic or video platforms,

without developing lightweight interaction models adapted to the accompanying usage scenarios of audio media, leading to a disconnect between function design and practical use.

### 5.4 Circle Communication Narrows the Scope of Connections

Audio platforms have established a relatively mature social collaboration system in terms of content production, successfully building a diverse and symbiotic content ecosystem encompassing UGC, PGC, and PUGC. This open production model has effectively activated the creative potential of social groups by lowering the threshold for creation and optimizing profit-sharing mechanisms, forming a content reservoir of considerable scale. However, in terms of relationship construction, audio platforms exhibit obvious functional lag. Compared with the weak-tie social network built by Weibo, the strong-relationship chains fostered by WeChat, or the interactive communities created by Douyin, audio platforms have never broken through the single role positioning of "content containers". The fundamental dilemma lies in the fact that platforms overly focus on large-scale production of content products while neglecting the systematic cultivation of user relationships, leading to a structural imbalance between the development of socialized production and socialized connection. This imbalance means that although platforms have massive content reserves, they lack an effective relationship network to promote the socialized dissemination of content, ultimately forming an operational paradox of "high production but weak dissemination".

Audio platforms have exposed deep-seated issues of ecological closure in the process of social transformation. Platforms such as Ximalaya FM tend to build independent content kingdoms, neither fully connecting to the open interfaces of social giants like WeChat nor effectively integrating users' existing social relationship networks. While this closed strategy ensures the uniqueness of the platform's content in the short term, it fundamentally limits the possibility of users expanding their relationships. Media is essentially an embodiment of social relations, yet the current operational logic of audio platforms remains at the binary communication level of "content-user," failing to rise to the



three-dimensional structure of “user-content-relationship.” When users cannot expand their social capital or strengthen existing relationships through the platform, their motivation to participate degenerates into pure content consumption, making it difficult to form sustained emotional investment. To break through this limitation, audio platforms need to reconstruct their media positioning—from content distribution platforms to relationship service platforms. By building cross-platform relationship bridges and developing relationship interaction rituals based on sound media, they can truly unleash the communication potential of socialized connections.

## **6. Optimization of Ximalaya FM’s Development Path**

### *6.1 Strengthen and Improve the Review Mechanism: A Dual Approach of “Machine Review + Manual Review”*

Under the User-Generated Content (UGC) model, audio platforms are faced with dual challenges of content quality and community governance. Although the open creative environment has stimulated users’ enthusiasm for participation, it has also brought governance problems such as verbal violence and vulgar content. These uncontrolled interactive behaviors not only damage the community atmosphere but may also trigger the phenomenon of online group polarization. To address these challenges, platforms need to establish a multi-level review and filtering system that combines automated screening by machine learning with professional judgment from manual review. At the technical level, intelligent tools such as voiceprint recognition and semantic analysis can be introduced to conduct real-time monitoring and hierarchical processing of sensitive content. Meanwhile, a user credit evaluation system should be built to guide users to form self-disciplined interactive habits through behavior records and community rating mechanisms. This governance model of “technical regulation + community self-governance” can both ensure the vitality of content production and maintain a good communication order.

### *6.2 Cultivate High-Quality Anchors with Distinctive Features to Improve Content Quality*

In terms of content production, Ximalaya FM has explored a stable content ecosystem composition model, forming a content

production closed loop through cooperation among copyright holders, anchors, guilds, and the platform for content output. Among them, the quality of anchors has a significant impact on content quality and even the development of the platform. Therefore, Ximalaya FM needs to strengthen the cultivation of anchors and the introduction of high-quality podcasts, so as to improve the quality and level of content producers. On one hand, Ximalaya FM has already tried a series of anchor training methods. It has helped the professional development and personalized growth of platform anchors through various anchor career support action plans (such as the “Tao Sheng Project”), anchor talent shows (such as the “Campus Podcast Competition”), and podcast academies. In the long run, audio platforms can carry out more systematic training, conduct distinctive cultivation according to anchor types, and create more high-quality anchors. In addition, they can actively cultivate content contributors and post-production editors to realize the professional operation of audio programs. On the other hand, Ximalaya FM is also actively inviting professional content production teams to settle in, expanding the Professional Generated Content (PGC) production matrix.

### *6.3 Strengthen the Construction of Interactive Functions to Enhance User Participation*

In the stage of stock competition where user growth dividends are fading, audio platforms need to reconstruct their interaction systems to improve user retention. Based on the characteristics of sound media, platforms can develop a new paradigm of “embedded interaction” by naturally implanting interactive nodes in audio content. Specifically, anchor voice guidance can be set at key plot points of audiobooks to invite listeners to share their feelings in real time through voice bullet screens; interactive easter eggs can be added at the end of programs to stimulate users’ desire to explore through sound clues; and a “story continuation” function can be developed to allow listeners to participate in content creation through voice contributions. This design concept of “content as interaction” can effectively solve the interaction obstacle of “listening interruption” in audio scenarios, making participation a natural extension of the listening experience. At the same time, emphasis should be placed on optimizing the voice message

system, establishing a sound social graph, and achieving accurate matching between users through voiceprint recognition and semantic analysis to cultivate interest-based communities based on sound characteristics.

Scenario integration that breaks through virtual boundaries is a key path to enhance user stickiness. At the online level, a “virtual listeners’ club” system can be created, enabling multi-person online co-listening through real-time voice chat rooms, and enhancing the sense of presence with elements such as virtual gifts and sound effects. Regular “anchor connection” activities should be held to build an interactive network across programs. At the offline level, it is necessary to systematically design sound social scenarios: hold immersive performances such as “sound theaters” to transform popular IPs into offline experiences; develop localized activities like “urban sound walks” to guide users to create local characteristic audio content; and establish physical “sound libraries” to provide equipment for users to record personalized audio works. Special attention should be paid to cultivating “sound idols”—improving anchors’ offline expressiveness through professional training to create audio KOLs with cross-border influence. This three-dimensional scenario construction can elevate audio interaction from the functional level to the emotional level.

#### *6.4 Expand External Platform Sharing Channels to Enhance User Stickiness*

In the evolution from attention economy to relationship economy, audio platforms need to break through the traditional logic of content distribution and build a new communication paradigm based on social relationships. This transformation is first reflected in the reconstruction of platform architecture, which should deeply integrate social graphs and interest graphs, and develop a “familiar listening circle” function. By securely accessing users’ address books with authorization, a friend listening dynamic prompt system can be established, making content consumption a form of social currency. At the same time, innovate the relationship recommendation mechanism by incorporating social weights into algorithmic recommendations, so that content favorited or liked by friends can gain higher exposure priority. In terms of the incentive system, a multi-level social fission model can be designed: users who invite friends to register can obtain

exclusive content rights; forming listening teams can unlock group benefits; and establishing a mentorship system allows senior users to guide newcomers. This design converts users’ social capital into the platform’s growth momentum, forming a positive cycle of “relationship-content-relationship”. More importantly, it is necessary to cultivate a culture of relationship consumption. Through functions such as “friends’ co-listening rankings” and “sound postcards”, audio interactions are embedded into users’ daily social rituals, making the platform a media link for maintaining social relationships.

### **7. Discussion and Conclusion**

In the media ecosystem of fierce multimedia competition, audio media has undergone a strategic transformation from marginalization to revival. Compared with the strong visual impact of video media, the unique accompanying characteristic of audio has instead become its core competitiveness in the mobile Internet era. The successful practice of Ximalaya FM shows that when audio platforms accurately grasp the essence of the “ear economy” and convert fragmented scenarios into advantages in content consumption, they can carve out a unique track in the battle for attention. This transformation is reflected in three dimensions: in terms of content forms, it has developed from a single broadcasting mode to a diversified product matrix including audiobooks, podcasts, and audio courses; in terms of usage scenarios, it covers daily gaps that traditional videos can hardly penetrate, such as commuting, housework, and bedtime; in terms of emotional connection, it establishes deep user stickiness through the unique intimacy of sound. It is precisely this differentiated media positioning that enables audio platforms to find an irreplaceable niche in the video-dominated era, achieving a value leap from “replaceable” to “irreplaceable”.

The rise of Ximalaya FM benefits from its constructed “content production-emotional communication” dual-drive model. On the content supply side, the platform creatively develops a PUGC ecosystem, which not only maintains the quality benchmark of professional content but also activates the scale effect of mass creation. Through the triple guarantee of an anchor incubation system, a copyright cooperation network, and intelligent distribution technology, it has built a content

infrastructure for continuous output. On the user connection side, it deeply explores the advantages of audio media in emotional communication and develops scenario-based social functions. For example, “bedtime stories” meet the need for emotional companionship, “knowledge FM” builds learning social circles, and “voice live broadcast rooms” realize real-time interaction. More crucially, the platform converts sound characteristics into social currency, establishing social relationship chains based on sound recognition through distinctive functions such as voiceprint recognition and voice interaction. This model breaks through the limitation of one-way transmission in traditional audio, making content consumption also a process of accumulating social capital, thus bringing more stable user loyalty to the platform.

Looking to the future, audio platforms need to evolve from a single content platform to a sound ecosystem platform. The primary task is to break through the closed system and build a cross-platform audio social network. This means both deepening API docking with social giants such as WeChat to achieve interconnection of relationship chains, and developing independent audio social protocols to establish industry standards. Secondly, it is necessary to expand the application scenarios of sound technology, exploring multi-terminal layouts such as smart homes, in-vehicle systems, and wearable devices, to infiltrate audio services into the Internet of Things ecosystem. More importantly, it is essential to cultivate a sound creation culture. By lowering the threshold for creation, enriching monetization channels, and improving copyright protection, the enthusiasm for national sound creation can be stimulated. The ultimate goal is to build a content ecosystem with sound as the link, where each user can be a consumer, a creator, and even a dissemination node, forming a cycle of value appreciation for sound. This ecological transformation will enable audio platforms to break through the limitations of traditional media and truly become an infrastructure of digital social life.

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# On the Translation of Vague Language in International Business Negotiations from the Perspective of Intercultural Communication

Rumeng Li<sup>1</sup> & Li Liu<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Xi'an Polytechnic University, Shaanxi, China

Correspondence: Rumeng Li, Xi'an Polytechnic University, Shaanxi, China.

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## Abstract

Successful international business negotiations are vital for the integration of the global economy. To avoid misunderstandings that can harm both parties, it's crucial to communicate with precision and clarity. However, vagueness can sometimes be beneficial in negotiations. The challenge is in effectively using and translating vague language, especially across different cultures. Further research is necessary to understand the application of vague language in cross-cultural communication in international business negotiations, as it has both practical and theoretical significance.

This study explores the use of vague language in international business negotiations from the perspective of cross-cultural communication. It thoroughly analyzes the practical purposes of vague language and uses relevant examples to support its claims. Additionally, the paper delves into the translation strategies of vague language in international business negotiations. The results of the study indicate that translators should consider the cultural differences between various countries and regions and adjust their translation strategies accordingly. These strategies include explicit and implicit translation, equivalent translation, omission translation, relevance translation, and communicative translation to cross the barriers of cultural differences as far as possible and to promote cross-cultural communication and trade.

**Keywords:** intercultural communication, international business negotiations, vague language, translation strategies

## 1. Introduction

With the increasing momentum of global economic integration, economic activities among countries and regions worldwide have become interdependent and interrelated, forming an organic whole on a global scale. In this objective process of world economic development, business negotiations between countries and

between regions have increased significantly, becoming a crucial component in the global business landscape today. International business negotiation refers to the process in which different stakeholders in international business activities negotiate on various terms of a transaction to reach an agreement. It serves as an indispensable means to adjust and resolve the inevitable economic interest conflicts

between governments and business entities of different countries and regions.

Negotiators in international business negotiations represent the interests of different countries and regions, with distinct social, cultural, economic, and political backgrounds. Their values, ways of thinking, behavioral patterns, languages, and customs vary significantly, rendering the factors influencing negotiations more complex and the negotiation process more challenging. In international business negotiations, one party often finds it inconvenient or unwilling to disclose its actual intentions to the other due to various hidden reasons. Under such circumstances, both parties may break certain rules of the cooperative principle and use vague language to gain more time for themselves, thereby creating favorable conditions for further negotiations and ultimately maximizing their interests. However, due to the linguistic and cultural differences across countries and regions, mistranslations of vague language in cross-cultural translation often lead to misunderstandings or even conflicts between negotiating parties, becoming obstacles to cross-cultural business negotiations. Therefore, to enhance the understanding and effective application of vague language in international business negotiations, this paper first elaborates on the relevant concepts of vague language, then further analyzes the pragmatic functions of vague language in international business negotiations, and subsequently expounds in detail the translation strategies of vague language in this context. It also explores how translators and international business negotiators can bridge the cultural gaps between different countries and regions to convey the connotations of vague language in international business negotiations in a tactful, polite, flexible, and efficient manner, thereby promoting communication and cooperation in international business activities from the perspective of cross-cultural communication.

### *1.1 Research Object*

The research object of this study is vague language in international business negotiations. In the modern international economic community, transactions usually require going through long and complicated negotiation processes. Although it is generally believed that the success or failure of a negotiation is ultimately determined by factors such as the quality of goods provided in the transaction, the

advancement of industrial technology, or the reasonableness of product prices, in actual business activities, the success or failure of a transaction often depends largely on whether the negotiation is successful. The basic procedure of international business negotiations consists of four distinct stages. Throughout this process, both negotiating parties often need to employ flexible negotiation techniques and adopt continuously adjusted negotiation strategies to achieve the optimal negotiation outcome. In business negotiation activities, the focus lies on “negotiating”—this means that language plays a crucial role in this process, while also involving a series of language application skills and pragmatic functions.

However, in international business negotiation activities, due to the different cultural backgrounds and the disparities in their respective business environments, the two negotiating parties often fail to achieve a high degree of consistency in their cognitive understanding of transaction matters and emotional resonance. This implicitly adds an obstacle to the negotiation and cooperation between the two sides. Therefore, in business negotiation activities, precise language sometimes fails to exert its inherent positive effect; on the contrary, in specific situations, the other party will neither sincerely recognize nor accept it, and it may even further lead to intense disputes and conflicts. Under such circumstances, to ensure the smooth progress of the negotiation, both parties will tactfully and skillfully use a large amount of vague language. By perceiving the hidden meanings behind the other party’s vague language, carefully analyzing the other party’s attitudes and intentions, they will eventually take corresponding measures to ease the negotiation atmosphere and promote the smooth conclusion of the transaction between the two sides. Nevertheless, in cross-cultural communication, the linguistic and cultural differences between the negotiating parties are likely to lead to mistranslations of vague language, resulting in unnecessary misunderstandings and conflicts between the cooperating parties, which is detrimental to cross-cultural business communication and cooperation. Therefore, the research on the translation of vague language in international business negotiations is of great significance and value both theoretically and practically.

## 1.2 Literature Review

This section provides a review of domestic and international research findings on vague language. British philosopher Bertrand Arthur William Russell (1923) pointed out that human language is more or less vague—this marked the initial formation of the vagueness theory. Austrian philosopher Ludwig Josef Johann Wittgenstein concurred with Russell's view, arguing that although many commonly used phrases are ambiguous, they can still be properly used by people as long as they fulfill their intended functions. American computer scientist Lotfi Zadeh (1965) proposed the “fuzzy set” theory; subsequently, linguists applied this theory to study linguistic vagueness from both semantic and pragmatic perspectives, gradually developing a new interdisciplinary discipline—fuzzy linguistics. In China, the study of Chinese fuzzy linguistics originated in the late 1970s. In his paper *A Preliminary Study of Vague Language*, Wu Tieping (1979) was the first to apply the vagueness theory to the study of linguistic vagueness—a contribution generally acknowledged as symbolizing the birth of fuzzy linguistics in China. Since then, Chinese researchers have published approximately 800 papers on fuzzy linguistics, greatly expanding the scope of China's linguistic research. In their work *Linguistic Vagueness and Translation*, Mao Ronggui and Fan Wuqiu (2005) pointed out that linguistic vagueness influences our translation principles: instead of blindly pursuing “fidelity”, we should adopt flexible approaches to translate vague language. They summarized four main translation techniques, namely “translating precision with precision”, “translating vagueness with precision”, “translating precision with vagueness”, and “translating vagueness with vagueness”. Yu Fubin (2000), in his *Vague Language and Translation*, explored the correlation between vague language and translation in detail, focusing on three basic translation methods—“using vagueness to render concreteness”, “using vagueness to render vagueness”, and “using concreteness to render vagueness”—with the aim of providing research insights into such translation theoretical issues as “literal translation” and “free translation”.

Through a review of relevant literature, it is found that there is a wealth of existing research on vague language. Most scholars have studied the translation strategies of vague language

from different perspectives, such as translatology and Skopos theory. By examining vague language in various contexts and texts, these scholars have proposed a series of translation principles and methods, laying a solid foundation for future research and inspiring other scholars in the field.

However, despite the richness of existing studies on vague language and its translation, research that focuses on the translation of vague language in international business negotiations from the perspective of intercultural communication remains relatively insufficient. Given the prominent role of cultural differences in international business negotiations and their direct impact on the understanding and translation of vague language, this research gap limits the practical guidance of existing translation theories for cross-cultural business negotiation practices.

Therefore, this study will focus on the translation of vague language in international business negotiations from the perspective of intercultural communication, and analyze whether translators adopt appropriate translation strategies and techniques in translating vague language to facilitate international business communication and cooperation. This research is expected to complement the existing body of knowledge by integrating intercultural communication theories with vague language translation studies, and to provide more targeted practical guidance for translators and business negotiators engaged in cross-cultural business activities.

## 2. Vague Language in International Business Negotiations

### 2.1 The Definition of Vague Language

The research on vague language has a long history, and the value of vague language has been recognized for various reasons. However, different linguistic disciplines hold different definitions of vague language, making it difficult to provide an accurate definition for it. Regarding the definition of vagueness, the linguistic philosopher Charles Sanders Peirce argued that when a thing exhibits several possible states, even if the speaker has carefully considered these states, they still cannot definitively determine whether to exclude these states from a certain proposition or attribute them to it. In such cases, the proposition is vague. Bertrand Russell, a British logician and

founder of analytic philosophy, pointed out that in our daily lives, there are numerous vague words, which are frequently used in our descriptive or narrative discourses, such as “long”, “short”, “fat”, and “thin”. Except for logic and mathematics, which are primarily characterized by rigor and precision, all other existing fields are often marked by uncertainty. Therefore, Russell believed that vagueness is analogous to a non-simple one-to-one relationship, but rather a system of one-to-many relationships.

## 2.2 The Relationship Between International Business Negotiations and Vague Language

In terms of category, international business negotiations are an extension of domestic business negotiations. As the name suggests, they refer to the behavioral activities in which stakeholders from two different countries or regions engage in continuous communication and consultation around the relevant key items of a specific transaction, and finally reach an agreement recognized by all parties involved in the business activity. In essence, international business negotiations are cross-cultural in nature. Differences in social, cultural, economic and political backgrounds increase the difficulty of international business negotiations and make the negotiating factors more complex. Therefore, higher requirements are placed on the negotiators’ language application skills and cultural literacy. Chen Hong (2011) pointed out that a flexible response style which is vague yet infinitely appealing also constituted one of the forms of “tactful replies”. The effective use of vague language, as a negotiation strategy and method, plays a positive role in both clarifying issues and easing the negotiation atmosphere when the negotiation reaches a deadlock or when conflicts of opinion arise among negotiation participants. Conducting research on the integration of vague language and international business negotiations not only helps enrich the research results of vague language and expand our research perspective on this linguistic phenomenon, but also achieves more positive business communication effects. By further understanding and mastering the practical application of vague language in business communication, business professionals can consciously and effectively use vague language to achieve the goal of successful cross-cultural communication.

## 3. The Pragmatic Functions of Vague Language

### in International Business Negotiations

Relevance Theory holds that in verbal communication, the words expressed by the speaker require the listener to make a certain amount of effort to comprehend. The listener not only needs to understand the literal meaning of the utterance but also capture the relevant implications of the discourse; this is conducive to the continuous and smooth progress of communication. In cross-cultural communication, especially in scenarios such as international business negotiations, the speaker must, based on the listener’s reasoning ability and knowledge scope, use vague language as a pragmatic strategy in specific contexts. This practice serves to fulfill pragmatic functions such as being euphemistic and polite, maintaining flexibility, and self-protection. Ultimately, it enhances the negotiation efficiency of stakeholders and provides support for cross-cultural business negotiations.

### 3.1 The Function of Euphemism and Politeness

To further enhance the politeness and euphemism of negotiation language, vague language plays a crucial role in international business negotiations. Lian Tianxue (2017) proposed that during the process of business negotiations, all parties should abide by the politeness principle. In this regard, the application of vague language could achieve the effects of being polite, euphemistic, indirect and appropriate. In the process of cross-border communication, the core idea of the politeness principle is to strive for the other party’s benefits as much as possible and maximize their interests, thereby making the other party feel respected and facilitating the establishment of sustainable and sound interpersonal relationships. In specific business activity cases, the use of vague language undoubtedly embodies the concept of civilized and friendly communication: when the two parties hold conflicting positions, vague language allows for the avoidance of explicit expression of opposing views; instead, it enables the presentation and exchange of information in a gentlemanly and non-confrontational manner. This not only prevents hurting the other party’s feelings but also avoids the negotiation from reaching a deadlock.

Example 1: “I have good reason to assume that if your pricing are favorably competitive with those of other suppliers, we may make ongoing



purchases with you.”

In this case, “have good reason”, “favorably”, and “other” are merely vague expressions, whose purpose is to reduce the sense of coercion inherent in the otherwise challenging negotiation content. Since it is inferred that the other party’s quotation is too high to reach an agreement, the term “favorably” euphemistically and implicitly requests the other party to lower the price. “Other” implies that the buyer has conducted market research prior to the negotiation and is well-acquainted with market prices. This also means that if the seller refuses to lower the price, the buyer will seek alternative suppliers, carrying an implicit implication of potential risk. The use of “have good reason” indicates that the buyer, in order to avoid the disruption of transactions between the two parties, adds a layer of sincerity to the negotiation discourse. By using these vague expressions, the buyer avoids explicitly opposing the other party’s pricing; meanwhile, it also makes the threat of seeking other suppliers less conspicuous, which constitutes a more friendly, implicit, and effective statement.

### 3.2 The Function of Flexibility and Adaptability

In business negotiations, the most crucial point is to strive to facilitate transactions in a harmonious and friendly atmosphere. This is particularly true for cross-border transactions: given that they involve more subtle factors—including differing cultural mentalities, social codes of conduct, and value systems—their complexity is significantly heightened. In such contexts, the use of vague language not only enriches the conduct of business activities but also enables all stakeholders to foster collaborative relationships based on dynamic market changes and economic objectives. During the course of business negotiations, vague language can adjust the rhythm of conversations while also influencing the way proposals are presented.

Example 2: “All the documents that are now accessible have previously been reviewed, and we unexpectedly discovered that each one encompasses more or less dubious aspects.”

As described, the speaker making the comment was expressing their disappointment with the test results. By inserting vague expressions such as “unexpectedly” and “more or less”, the entire statement became more coherent and appropriate. This not only facilitated the other

party’s understanding and acceptance but also avoided the harm to the emotional rapport between the two parties that blunt language would have caused. In negotiation scenarios like this, vague language could obviously preserve the “face” of business participants in the negotiation, reserve sufficient buffer space and thinking time for the interlocutors, and achieve the positive effect of clearly indicating the problem while flexibly avoiding conflicts.

### 3.3 The Function of Self-Protection

In the field of international trade and economics, the use of vague language plays a significant positive role in safeguarding one’s own interests under two specific circumstances. Firstly, when certain clients request that we assume specific responsibilities and risks, the use of vague language can greatly facilitate self-protection. Secondly, when the information we provide may inevitably have a negative impact on other clients, the use of vague language enables us to maintain a relatively advantageous position in future business activities.

Example 3: “The products we offer may represent the finest workmanship on the market throughout the world.”

Due to the ambiguous meaning of “may” in the aforementioned context, the supplier’s liability is significantly reduced. If the buyer later discovers another product of higher quality in the market, this often cannot serve as a ground for terminating the contract. Since “may” allows for interpretations of varying degrees, the seller has full discretion over the use of this term. Even in cases where the buyer accuses the seller of acts such as breaching good faith, the seller can fully leverage the ambiguity of “may” to achieve the goal of self-protection and minimize risks and losses.

## 4. Translation Strategies of Vague Language in International Business Negotiations

Words often acquire their true meaning only in specific contexts. Compared with bilingual proficiency, the translator’s level of cognitive understanding of two distinct cultures determines the quality of the translation to a certain extent. Vagueness is an inherent objective property of language. While it exerts positive effects, it also poses significant challenges to translators’ work: on the one hand, translators must take into account the specific business linguistic context; on the other hand, they need to integrate cross-cultural factors. In

international business negotiations, while using vague language cautiously, greater emphasis should be placed on the accurate translation of vague language. This not only affects the negotiation outcomes but also relates to the rights and obligations that stakeholders are obligated to undertake.

#### 4.1 Explicitation and Implication

Explicitation is a direct and explicit translation strategy. Specifically, it refers to the practice where translators expand specific textual materials by adding content-related explanatory or connective words, thereby making the translated text more logical and easier to understand and accept. Implication, in contrast to explicitation, requires the appropriate omission of certain words or other elements during the specific translation process. Both explicitation and implication can be adopted as translation strategies in many economic tasks, but their specific application depends on the specific needs of the trade process.

The use of explicitation can largely bridge the cultural differences between participants in business activities, allowing for an intuitive understanding of the true meaning of the content. This is undoubtedly the most effective approach for revealing the hidden meaning of discourses. However, in some awkward business negotiation scenarios, implication is used more frequently, as it provides a safety net for relatively sensitive topics.

Example 4: “We provide direct services on a bimonthly basis for steamers departing from Shanghai towards Australia.”

Translation: 我们有从上海到澳大利亚的直达船，每半月一次。

Direct shipping from Shanghai to Australia is feasible, but the term “bimonthly” is ambiguous—it could refer to “每半月一次” or “每两个月一次”. In this case, the specific reference of “bimonthly” is relatively vague, which may lead to information confusion or even misunderstanding among the other stakeholders. Therefore, under such circumstances, we can adopt an explicit translation strategy centered on the semantic meaning of the source language. By accurately grasping the true trade information and based on objective facts, we can clearly and precisely interpret “bimonthly” as “每半月一次”. This decisively avoids semantic ambiguity and achieves information parity between the

negotiating parties.

Example 5: “We have scrutinized all the bottles and detected each of them was leaking.”

Translation: 我们已经检查了所有的瓶子，发现或多或少都在漏水。

To soften the tone of this statement, we can translate the phrase “each of them” as “或多或少”. By adopting the implication translation strategy, the original meaning is veiled and obscured, making the expression of the text more implicit and euphemistic. This mitigates the sharpness of the problem and preserves the friendly communication atmosphere essential for negotiations. While facilitating the listener’s quick comprehension of the discourse meaning, it also reduces the intensity of verbal stimulation. Undoubtedly, the effective application of the implication strategy significantly minimizes the arbitrariness of speech acts.

#### 4.2 The Equivalence Translation Method

When translating vague language in international business negotiations, the Equivalence translation method can also be adopted based on specific contexts. This method involves replacing the vague language in the source language with vague language in the target language. While preserving the vagueness of the source text, it also takes the target language culture into account, thereby facilitating the other party’s reception and understanding of the information. Meanwhile, to reflect the vagueness of the source language, translators should prioritize literal translation as much as possible, under the principle of not altering the meaning of the source text.

Example 6: “We will prepare all the necessary documentation and present it to the responsible authority. And we will do it within three months.”

Translation: 我们将在三个月内准备所有必要的文件，并将其提交给主管部门。

In this example, the translator first identifies the vague phrase “do it within three months” in the original utterance, then adopts a literal translation approach to clearly convey the meaning of the source discourse in the target language. The Equivalence Translation Method effectively preserves the vague language in both the source language and the target language. If disputes arise among various stakeholders in subsequent business activities, the speaker—by

retaining the vagueness of the source language—can avoid many issues and liabilities, achieve effective self-protection, and ultimately gain greater verbal initiative in the negotiation and consultation between the two parties.

#### 4.3 The Omission Translation Method

In business activities, vague language is applied in various negotiation scenarios. However, in certain contexts, vague language has little relevance to the core points of contention in the overall information and exerts no substantial impact on the negotiation content of stakeholders in terms of semantics. Therefore, on the premise of fully understanding the core information conveyed by the source language, translators can flexibly adjust their translation strategies and effectively apply the Omission translation method, appropriately omitting the translation of vague language in business negotiations. The positive effect of this approach is that it reduces translation efforts while conveying the core information concisely and clearly, thereby improving the efficiency of cross-cultural business negotiations.

Example 7: “The drug produced by our company can relieve some symptoms commonly associated with fallen arches.”

Translation: 我们公司生产的药物可以缓解足弓脱落的症状。

In this sentence, the two vague terms “some” and “commonly” are involved. However, during the translation process, we can find that these two vague terms have no impact on the overall semantics of the sentence; instead, they make the negotiation content more complicated and create an obvious sense of redundancy. Therefore, under such circumstances, translators may choose to omit these two vague expressions, or in some cases, make targeted revisions based on the language preferences of the negotiation counterparts.

#### 4.4 The Relevance Translation Method

The Relevance Translation Method for vague language in business negotiations refers to a practice where, within a specific context, the translator first refines the source language information in the simplest and most direct manner, then conducts translation processing by integrating it with the specific cultural background of the target language. The core focus lies in reasoning about obscure concepts within the information and exploring the

meaning of vague language in its specific cultural context. Vague language in business activities can often provide both negotiating parties with more room for understanding and reflection, enabling the speaker to achieve a more desirable expressive effect than that of precise language. Therefore, correctly leveraging the relevance between the source language information and the other party’s psychological expectations is a key strategy that translators must grasp when translating vague language in cross-cultural business negotiations.

For instance, in business negotiations, negotiating parties often use the phrase “good quality and low prices” to make positive descriptions of a product’s quality and price. If this vague phrase is directly translated as “好的质量与低廉的价格”, the expression will appear rigid and unnatural, causing confusion in the information receiver’s understanding to a certain extent. However, if the translation is carried out by integrating the linguistic and cultural background as well as the expressive habits of the target language—taking Chinese as the target language here as an example—translating it as “物美价廉” not only conveys the core information concisely and clearly but also achieves a better reception effect. This makes the other party feel more approachable and effectively narrows the psychological and emotional distance between the negotiating parties. Chen Shanshan and Yu Peng (2015) pointed out that translators need to draw on the useful information of vague language, integrate various contextual factors, and identify the optimal relevance between the vague language in the source text and its context. Although language is subjective and translation is also a subjective process, the application of language ultimately needs to serve our objective context. This characteristic is particularly prominent, especially in business activities.

#### 4.5 The Communicative Translation Method

The “communicative translation” theory proposed by Peter Newmark emphasizes the outcomes generated by information. Similarly, Eugene A. Nida, in his “dynamic equivalence” theory, also stresses the “equivalence between the response of the source text readers and that of the target text readers.” Vague language manifests itself at various levels such as phonetics, discourse, and text, which largely increases the ambiguity of negotiation

information. Zhao Junfeng (1999) argued that in economic and trade translation, translators should carefully analyze the source text, and on the basis of full comprehension and under the premise of conforming to linguistic conventions, properly convey the meaning of the source text. Therefore, when translating vague language in cross-cultural business negotiations, translators should prioritize the purpose of communication and the effects of information transmission, so as to avoid further ambiguities and conflicts between the negotiating parties. For example, consider the phrase “a hot dog”: if the stress falls on the first syllable (“hot”), the information conveyed refers to a type of fast food; if both words are stressed, the core meaning communicated is “a very hot dog” (referring to the animal).

Huang Haixia (2022) pointed out that in international business negotiations, negotiators should adopt different negotiation strategies based on distinct cultural characteristics. International business negotiations are a form of cross-cultural communication. Translators must proficiently master the linguistic and cultural backgrounds as well as the expressive conventions of different countries and regions to convey information accurately and effectively, thereby achieving the goal of successful communication.

Example 8: “The project went a bomb.”

The exact equivalent of “bomb” is “炸弹” in Chinese. However, this word carries distinct meanings in the cultural contexts of the United States and the United Kingdom. In the United States, “bomb” means “a thing that fails badly,” so in this linguistic context, the sentence translates to “这个项目太失败了”. In the United Kingdom, by contrast, “bomb” means “a successful thing,” making the sentence convey the meaning of “这个项目棒极了”. Therefore, in practical international business negotiation activities, translators must not only possess bilingual proficiency but also take into account the diverse social, cultural, economic, and political backgrounds of different countries and regions, and handle the translation of vague language with great caution. Otherwise, the information conveyed will be vastly different, which may hinder or even trigger disputes in international business negotiations within cross-cultural communication.

## 5. Conclusion

From the perspective of cross-cultural communication, this study analyzes and explores the translation strategies of vague language in international business negotiations. Through the analysis of the above examples, the author draws the following conclusions: In cross-cultural communication, especially in scenarios such as international business negotiations, the use of vague language as a pragmatic strategy can achieve pragmatic functions including tact and politeness, flexibility, and self-protection. The study finds that when translating vague language in international business negotiations, translators, by fully considering the differences in cultural backgrounds between different countries and regions, appropriately adopt five translation strategies—namely, explicitation and implicitation, the Equivalence Translation Method, the Omission Translation Method, the Relevance Translation Method, and the Communicative Translation Method. These strategies help to overcome cultural differences to the greatest extent, convey the connotation of vague language in international business negotiations effectively and accurately, promote cross-cultural communication and trade, and also play a positive role in cross-cultural translation.

In international trade, the ability to express emotions effectively and maintain cooperative relationships constitutes a key factor in the smooth progression of business activities. The economic utility of language lies in the way various stakeholders leverage language to obtain expected economic benefits. Vague language in international business negotiations, by virtue of its unique pragmatic functions, is widely applied in foreign-oriented business activities. Therefore, greater emphasis should be placed on the research of translation strategies for vague language in international business negotiations. We should continuously develop new translation methods and techniques to translate vague language in business negotiations more accurately and effectively. This will not only promote the development of enterprises’ foreign trade and safeguard the interests of all stakeholders to the greatest extent but also facilitate communication and cooperation in international business activities from the perspective of cross-cultural communication.

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