

Translation Strategies of Internet Neologism in Chinese Social Media Red Note

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Received: September 26, 2025

Accepted: March 7, 2025

Online Published: June 17, 2026

doi:10.5430/wjel.v16n5p538

URL: <https://doi.org/10.5430/wjel.v16n5p538>

Abstract

Neologism refers to lexical items that introduce new forms or meanings not previously included in an existing vocabulary system (Xiong, 2006). These expressions often reflect current events and social changes and enter everyday communication. The appearance of neologism enriches modern Chinese vocabulary. Many scholars have examined the translation study of neologism. And translating them has become an important topic in telling Chinese stories well. However, translators often face challenges because neologism have distinct characteristics, unique cultural connotations and profound meaning. These features make accurate translation into English difficult and often lead to inappropriate or even incorrect translations (Qiu, 2014). This research focuses on the internet neologisms in the social media Red Note. And analyze translation strategies of them in machine translation and find out typical translation problems. Then refer to corpus COCA to compare different translations and analyze translation strategies of them. Therefore, this research has guiding significance to neologism translation practice and summarize more accurate translation.

Keywords: neologism, corpus, translation strategies

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

The term “neologism” originates from the French néologisme, which comprises the Greek-derived prefix νέος- (“new”) and the root λόγος (“word” or “speech”). The term literally means “new word”. Lexicographically, major English dictionaries provide similar definition. The both the Cambridge Dictionary and the Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English characterize a neologism as “a new word or expression, or a new meaning for an existing word” (Tao, 2017). The Oxford Dictionary similarly defines it as “a newly coined word or expression” or “the coining or use of new words”. These definitions highlight two key characteristics: lexical novelty and socio-linguistic markedness, which are often manifested in restricted circulation within a specific speech community.

The contemporary era is defined by a profound technological revolution that permeates virtually all dimensions of human existence. This paradigm-shifting advancement, as a preeminent phenomenon of our time, exerts a transformative influence on the conceptual and linguistic modeling of reality. From a linguistic perspective, such transformation necessitates and precipitates significant lexical adaptation. Speakers respond to these changes mainly through two processes: creating new lexical items and assigning new meanings to existing words (Awadh & Khan, 2020).

Linguistics categorizes these lexical innovations as neologisms. Echoing this scholarly consensus, Newmark (1988) provides a foundational definition, characterizing neologisms as “newly coined lexical units or existing lexical units that acquire a new sense.”

1.1.1 Features of Neologisms

With the rapid development of society, many old things have died out and evolved, while new things keep emerging. When new things emerge, people need to create neologisms or give new meanings to old words to refer to such new things, and thus neologisms come into being. The emergence of neologisms has a certain promoting effect on enriching the vocabulary of modern Chinese language. Therefore, more and more scholars have begun to study neologisms. Chen Yuan (1987:7), the earliest scholar in China to observe and analyze neologisms, clearly pointed out that neologisms include not only those that emerged not long ago and whose meanings, colors and expressions all give people a sense of novelty, but also the new images and new usages of old words. Neologisms and expressions are words borrowed from other languages, Chinese dialects, and industry terms, as well as old words that have developed new meanings and usages (Liao & Li, 2019). Based on this, neologisms can be defined as those that emerge in a specific period and can reflect new concepts, new things, and new discoveries (Yang, Yao & Liao, 2020). Language, as a social phenomenon, is closely related to human society and it changes along with the development of society. Neologisms often reflect current hot events and gradually integrate into people’s daily communication.

Internet neologisms exhibit distinctive sociolinguistic characteristics that reflect the dynamic and hybrid nature of digital communication.

These include: 1. Linguistic Hybridity and Register Mixing: Digital neologisms frequently demonstrate multilingual and multi-register integration, incorporating elements from specialized terminology, subcultural slang, professional jargon, and colloquial speech. This code-blending serves to negotiate identity, signal in-group membership, and facilitate communication across diverse discursive domains. 2. Linguistic Creativity and Play: The formation of internet neologisms is often driven by conscious linguistic manipulation and innovation. Common morphological and semantic processes include abbreviation, lexical blending, semantic recategorization, and other forms of language play that prioritize expressivity, brevity, and novelty within constrained digital environments. 3. Dialogicity and Informality: Aligned with the quasi-oral nature of computer-mediated communication, internet neologisms emerge within contexts marked by high dialogic engagement and pragmatic informality. This is often accompanied by the use of paralinguistic markers such as emojis, emoticons, and memetic visuals, which supplement textual meaning and convey affective and interpersonal nuances. (Olena, 2024).

1.1.2 Neologisms in Red Note

Social networking platforms have undergone a profound functional transformation, evolving from their initial conception as predominantly recreational and interpersonal communication tools into ubiquitous, multifunctional socio-technical systems. This paradigm shift is quantitatively underscored by recent empirical data; for instance, the Global Digital 2021 report indicates that social media penetration now exceeds half of the global population, signifying their near-universal integration into daily life (Olena, 2024).

Consequently, contemporary social networks have transcended their original purpose to assume critical roles across diverse societal domains. They function as instrumental platforms for political mobilization and discourse, shaping public opinion and facilitating civic engagement. Simultaneously, they have emerged as vital infrastructures for commercial activity and entrepreneurship, enabling marketing, consumer interaction, and e-commerce.

Furthermore, these platforms constitute hybrid information ecosystems, serving as primary portals for news dissemination and consumption, albeit with implications for information quality and algorithmic curation. Integral to this multifunctionality is their role as pluralistic discursive arenas, where individuals and collectives perform identity, articulate opinions, and forge communities of interest, thereby reconfiguring traditional boundaries between the private and public spheres with like-minded people.

As a prominent platform for discourse among youth and middle-aged demographics, Red Note has established a significant user base, exceeding 350 million as of January 2024. Notably, 77.86% of its users fall within the 18-34 age cohort (Wang & Duan, 2025). This platform has undeniably been instrumental in the proliferation and popularization of Chinese neologisms. The translation of these neologisms into English, however, presents a considerable challenge. Characterized by distinct temporality, unique cultural connotations, and semantic depth, such terms are susceptible to inadequate or erroneous translation. Consequently, the English translation of Chinese neologisms remains a persistent and central concern within academic circles.

Given that internet neologisms are inherently products of their specific socio-temporal context, translators must adopt a nuanced approach. This involves moving beyond the mere transmission of superficial meaning to engage with the underlying socio-cultural conditions that these terms encapsulate. An effective translation, therefore, should strive to convey the lived experience and societal attitudes of the era, thereby illuminating the broader significance of the neologism's emergence (Chen, 2021)

1.2 Problem Statement

The main purpose of translating Internet neologism is to promote cultural exchange and dissemination. As people are in a highly developed era of network information, the translation of Internet neologism, as a bridge for communication among cultures of various countries, plays a very important role in online communication. Although the English translation of Chinese has been relatively mature. However, due to the late birth of English translations of Internet neologism and popular Chinese phrases, a relatively unified consensus on English translation has not been formed at present. There are also differences in strategy selection and translation effects. The overall situation is not optimistic.

1.2.1 Current Research of Internet Neologism Translation

At present, the widespread application of network information technology has significantly impacted both production and daily life, driving the development of modern society while also exerting notable influence on language use. On one hand, the proliferation of internet neologisms has enriched the Chinese language in terms of semantics and lexicon, contributing positively to its innovative evolution.

A preliminary search in the CNKI database reveals the following thematic associations with "Red Note": social media, APP, e-commerce platform, new media, short video, strategic research, and marketing strategy. Subsequent queries combining "Red Note + translation studies," "Red Note + neologisms," and "Red Note + neologism translation" yield no relevant results. This evident gap in scholarly attention underscores the significance of investigating neologism translation and corresponding strategies within the context of Red Note.

Guided by Newmark's translation theory, this study will analyze translation strategies applied to neologisms on Red Note. Through comparative analysis, it aims to identify and summarize the most appropriate approaches for rendering such dynamically evolving lexical items in cross-cultural communication.

1.2.2 Users in Red Note

Given that the target readership comprises a significant number of non-native Chinese speakers, information feedback regarding translation acceptability tends to be delayed. Consequently, it is challenging to refine or revise translated neologisms in a timely manner based on reader reception, making inaccuracies and mistranslations almost inevitable.

On the other hand, Red Note, as a social platform with a substantial user base, allows its users to present and share aspects of their lives with both domestic and international audiences. The language employed in these contexts is often characterized by informality, spontaneity, and a playful tone, which does not typically hinder communication among domestic users. However, since the majority of users are not professional translators, when interacting with foreign audiences, many internet neologisms—particularly those embedded with distinct Chinese cultural connotations—are frequently mistranslated. This undoubtedly obstructs effective cross-cultural communication.

As Red Note continues to gain global traction, an increasing number of international users are joining the platform, with American users constituting a particularly prominent group.

After TikTok was banned in the United States, a large number of users began to use Red Note to share their daily lives and learn about the unique and authentic lives of Chinese netizens. However, due to language and cultural differences, as well as the varying levels of English proficiency among Red Note users in China, when sharing their real lives with foreign users, many Chinese words, especially the self-created, informal and fun internet neologisms, cannot be accurately expressed in the target language. Thus, the phenomenon of mistranslation of internet neologisms occurs. Each Red Note user in China has a different level of English proficiency, so when translating the same internet neologism, different versions may arise. This causes confusion for foreign users and poses obstacles to cross-cultural communication.

1.2.3 Lack of Translation Strategies

In the domain of English translation from Chinese, literal and free translation are conventionally regarded as the two principal methodological paradigms. While each approach offers specific merits, their respective constraints are also well-documented. In contemporary practice, particularly concerning classical Chinese literature, a synergistic strategy—wherein literal and free translation are judiciously integrated and adapted to contextual imperatives—has gained prominence as the prevailing norm.

By contrast, scholarly investigation into the English translation of Chinese internet neologisms and popular expressions constitutes an emergent subfield that remains largely exploratory. Approaches to rendering such terms are still in a developmental phase, characterized by ongoing experimentation (Wang, 2023). The application of strict literal translation to internet neologisms frequently yields output that is semantically opaque or pragmatically unintelligible to the target audience. Free translation, though capable of transmitting core semantic content, demands that translators first attain a nuanced comprehension of the sociocultural underpinnings and connotative dimensions of these expressions—a process fraught with difficulty.

Two primary challenges arise herein. First, translators may lack sufficient familiarity with the socio-discursive milieu from which these neologisms originate, resulting in foundational misinterpretations of meaning and usage. Second, even when the semantic and pragmatic content is adequately grasped, free translation often attenuates or neutralizes the original expression's distinctive rhetorical features—such as humor, irony, and stylistic vividness. Consequently, the translated output may satisfy denotative requirements yet fail to reproduce the expressive impact and affective texture of the source text, thereby compromising its communicative efficacy.

1.3 Research Purposes

The overall objective of this study is first to classify the internet neologisms on the social media platform Red Note, then to search for their translations through machine translation, Youdao translation and study the translation strategies. Subsequently, the translations will be retrieved in the corpus COCA, and finally, the most appropriate translation strategies will be summarized through manual comparison and analysis. Specifically, the research purposes of this study are as follows:

1. To classify Internet neologisms in Red Note.
2. To analyze translation strategies of Internet neologism in Red Note.
3. To summarize the most appropriate translation strategies of Internet neologism in Red Note.

1.4 Research Problems

In view of the research purpose of this study, the specific research questions of this study are as follows:

1. What are categories of Internet neologisms in Red Note?
2. What are the translation strategies of Internet neologisms in Red Note?
3. How can translation of neologism in Red Note and corpus be summarized by comparative study?

1.5 Research Meanings

The emergence and widespread use of internet neologisms exert a significant impact on the evolution and application of the Chinese language. Not only do they drive innovation in linguistic expression and development, but they also influence practical usage contexts and academic frameworks within Chinese linguistics. The progression of eras and the continuous advancement of language—accompanied by the steady creation of new vocabulary—contribute not only to the convenience of daily communication but also to the enrichment of

human linguistic resources as a whole. In particular, advances in computer network technology have diversified and facilitated channels for both domestic and cross-cultural communication. This has given rise to numerous concise and seemingly informal internet neologisms that are nonetheless widely comprehensible. While such neologisms enhance communicative efficiency, they concurrently pose considerable challenges to translation practice.

These challenges necessitate the ongoing refinement and expansion of translation theory, as well as the innovation of translation methods and techniques, in order to effectively address the complexities involved in rendering internet neologisms across languages. Only through accurate and context-sensitive translation can international communication be expanded, potential misunderstandings minimized, and a functional bridge—or transfer station—between Chinese and English be established, thereby facilitating barrier-free global exchange (Chen, 2021).

1.6 Research Scope

The scope of this study is the yearly internet neologisms on Red Note in 2024, as they are spontaneously created and used by netizens, and they are a true reflection of the real life of netizens throughout 2024. Subsequently, regarding the translation of these internet neologisms in Youdao translation, the machine translation, this study will first conduct a comparative analysis with the corpus in the English language. Then, by adopting a qualitative research approach, it will study and summarize the translation strategies of the internet neologisms in Youdao translation and COCA, the corpus, and subsequently carry out a comparative analysis to ultimately identify the most appropriate translation and translation strategies. The specific steps will be detailed in the methodology section of this study.

2. Material Studied

2.1 Neologism Translation Strategies

In the Internet era, all kinds of hot news events keep emerging, which has also given rise to a large number of news neologisms. Through these news neologisms, not only can the current phenomena of social development in China be reflected, but they can also become an important calling card for China's external communication and exchanges. However, there are problems of inaccurate translation in the translation of many news neologisms. In order to better promote comprehensive communication and exchanges between China and other countries, it is necessary to conduct in-depth research on news neologisms and conduct in-depth analysis of news translation methods using skopos. Only in this way can the overall level of China's foreign publicity be improved.

Awadh and Shafiull (2020) comparatively studied on the challenges of translating neologisms from English into Arabic, contrasting the performance of human translation students with that of machine translation (MT) systems. The research highlights that neologisms—newly coined lexical units or existing words with novel meanings—pose significant difficulties for both human and machine translators due to their novelty, contextual dependency, and rapid proliferation, particularly in the field of information and communication technology (ICT). The study employs a descriptive-comparative methodology, analyzing translations from 55 Yemeni translation students and three MT applications (Google Translate, Systran, Al-Wafi). Results indicate that while both groups struggle, human translators achieve a higher rate of acceptable translations (43.41%) compared to MT (30.55%).

In addition, Chen Xiuchun (2022) pointed out that Internet neologisms to a certain extent reflect the new trends in the development of various fields of society. Therefore, Internet neologisms have become one of the research hotspots of concern in the academic circle. Therefore, she takes Internet neologisms as the research object, analyzed the characteristics of Internet neologisms and their word formation features, and found that neologisms have popularity, mass appeal, randomness and temporariness. Subsequently, based on this, the translation strategies of neologisms were summarized under the guidance of skopos. Through the research on the translation strategies of Internet neologisms, it is expected to further enhance the regularity of the research on the translation of Internet neologisms and provide useful inspirations for the translation of other types of neologisms. The translation of news texts, regardless of the translation theory based on or the translation strategy adopted, is aimed at disseminating information more accurately. Translation skopos has received increasing attention nowadays and is even systematically studied as a discipline. It has also been continuously improved in the process of practice.

The study by Olena Kovalova (2024), entitled *Classification of Neologisms in Social Networks and Methods of Their Translation*, constitutes a systematic investigation into the morphological generation, categorical classification, and translational treatment of neologisms within Anglophone social media ecosystems, with a focus on platforms including YouTube, Twitter (X), Facebook, and Instagram. The research objectives encompass both the taxonomic delineation of digital neologisms and the formulation of applied translation methodologies appropriate for their cross-linguistic transfer.

The analysis foregrounds the socio-pragmatic and discursive specificities of computer-mediated communication, notably its informal register, dialogic orientation, pervasive use of emotive and paralinguistic markers, and a pronounced tendency toward lexical innovation via blending, abbreviation, and semantic extension. Drawing upon a curated corpus exceeding 100 social media-derived neologisms, the study evaluates a spectrum of translation procedures, such as transcoding (encompassing transliteration and transcription), calquing, descriptive translation, equivalent correspondence, and direct lexical borrowing.

Quantitative findings indicate that within the Ukrainian translational context, the predominant strategies are descriptive translation (31%), transliteration/transcription (28%), and direct inclusion (19%). The study underscores the paramount importance of contextual sensitivity and cultural adaptation in rendering digital neologisms, advocating for a polymethodological and functionally adaptive approach to ensure

discursive clarity, cultural coherence, and textual acceptability in the target language.

2.2 Peter Newmark's Translation Theory

The seminal work of Peter Newmark, *An Exploration of Translation Issues* (1981), marks a foundational contribution to translation studies through the systematic introduction of the dichotomous concepts of semantic translation and communicative translation, alongside the delineation of six primary textual functions: expressive, informative, vocative, aesthetic, phatic, and metalingual. This framework constitutes the cornerstone of what is recognized as Newmarkian translation theory.

The theoretical distinction between semantic and communicative translation is principally manifested in two dimensions. First, they are oriented toward divergent objectives. Communicative translation is fundamentally receptor-oriented, prioritizing the comprehension and acceptability of the target language readership. While maintaining fidelity to the source text's form where feasible, it permits the acculturation of culturally embedded elements, thereby facilitating the clear and direct transmission of the original's content and message (Yang, 2017). Conversely, semantic translation is author-focused, seeking to remain faithful to the cognitive processes and stylistic choices of the original writer. It strives to preserve the syntactic structures and grammatical norms of the source language as closely as possible, transmitting information while often retaining cultural-specific references in their original form rather than explicating them within the target culture's frame (Zhang, 2024).

Consequently, communicative translation emphasizes the pragmatic effect and functional adequacy of the target text over strict formal correspondence. Semantic translation, in contrast, tends toward what might be termed "over-translation" or a higher degree of textual fidelity, preserving the stylistic and structural features of the source text to an extent that may require greater interpretative effort from the target reader (Liao, 2000).

Newmark's theoretical framework, particularly the communicative model, has proven instrumental in the translation analysis of applied texts. For instance, Wang (2019) employs Newmark's communicative theory to investigate translation strategies for internet neologisms and emergent socio-lexical innovations. Given the significant cultural divergence between Chinese and Western contexts, the timely and effective translation of such neologisms is crucial to mitigating communicative barriers that arise from sociolinguistic evolution. Wang posits that neologisms are sociocultural indices and argues that their translation necessitates not mechanical transference but a comprehensive analysis encompassing content, etymology, psycholinguistic factors, cultural underpinnings, and linguistic conventions. This analysis informs a recreative process tailored to the target audience, a process for which Newmark's communicative translation offers a coherent and purpose-aligned theoretical perspective.

Similarly, Liang and Tang (2021) apply communicative translation theory to English scientific and technological texts, which are characterized by an emphasis on scientificity, objectivity, and logical rigor. They contend that translating such texts requires attention not only to the accurate rendering of source content but also to its comprehensibility for the specialized target readership. Guided by communicative principles, they propose differentiated strategies: for technical neologisms, a combination of literal and free translation; for complex sentences, techniques such as splitting, amplification, and conversion; and for atypical syntactic structures, word-order rearrangement. Their analysis underscores the necessity of flexibly selecting and applying translation techniques based on specific textual features to enhance the intelligibility of the source material for its intended audience.

In addition, it can also provide reference significance for the translation of tourism texts and promote the development of domestic tourism. Similarly, foreign news is also an important medium for information exchange and cultural dissemination. The translation of foreign news undoubtedly becomes an important reprocessing activity process. Xu Xiufen and Zhao Kangwen (2022), relying on Newmark's communicative translation, took the report in China Daily Bilingual News Network in 2020 as an example to analyze the translation strategies and techniques used in the translation of foreign news at the levels of neologisms, sentences and articles. Research shows that through the analysis of the three levels of vocabulary, syntax and text, as well as under the guidance of communicative translation, the use of interpretive translation at the vocabulary level, the use of word order adjustment at the sentence level and the use of additive translation at the text level, it can be seen that communicative translation theory plays an extremely important guiding role in the process of translating foreign news and has high reference value. The translation of foreign news uses accurate neologisms and concise sentences, basically achieving the purpose of communicative translation. At the same time, it also achieves the goals of efficient information exchange and promoting Chinese culture.

2.3 Corpora Research

Since the late 20th century, corpus research has emerged as a rapidly developing interdisciplinary field in China, fostering specialized sub-disciplines such as corpus lexicology, corpus stylistics, and corpus translation studies. The application of corpus methodology to literary studies, grounded in empirical data derived from authentic textual corpora, enables researchers to yield more conclusive and objective findings. This approach can uncover subtle literary features often imperceptible through manual analysis alone, thereby offering deeper insights into the significance and value of literary works (Zou & Zhang, 2023).

As an encyclopedic repository of classical Chinese culture, *Dream of the Red Chamber* incorporates a substantial number of color neologisms that embody distinct aesthetic and literary values. Influenced by divergent geographical, historical, and cultural contexts, the usage and interpretation of color neologisms vary significantly between English and Chinese linguistic systems. These variations manifest in differing cultural perceptions and connotations associated with specific colors among readers from distinct cultural backgrounds. To

systematically investigate these culturally embedded expressions, Sun (2023) conducted a detailed study utilizing the Chinese-English Parallel Corpus of Dream of the Red Chamber developed by Shaoxing University of Arts and Sciences. The research focused on high-frequency color neologisms within the novel, examining culture-loaded terms to analyze cross-cultural similarities and differences in their connotations and corresponding translation strategies.

The study identified that the five colors—red, purple, white, yellow, and black—occur with the highest frequency in Dream of the Red Chamber. Corpus query results revealed that each color appears in multiple lexical forms, some of which carry significant cultural load. For instance, red is associated with prosperity, vitality, and success; purple conveys imperial authority and immortality; white predominantly signifies funerary contexts; and yellow often refers to specific social groups, such as the elderly. The author concludes that in translating such neologisms, the primary task is to clarify the translational purpose: whether to faithfully preserve the source culture's connotations or to prioritize target-reader comprehensibility. Subsequently, translators must conduct in-depth analysis to determine the specific cultural weight of each term. Finally, appropriate translation methods and strategies should be selected, striving to balance fidelity to the original text with the effective conveyance of Chinese cultural nuances.

Beyond classical literature, corpus methodology also illuminates modern literary works. Amy Tan's novel *The Joy Luck Club*, which portrays intergenerational and cross-cultural conflicts among four Chinese-American mother-daughter pairs, explores themes of cultural clash, integration, and the negotiation of Chinese cultural identity. Zou and Zhang (2023) argue that corpus-based textual analysis—particularly through the use of large bilingual or parallel corpora—can profoundly reveal the deep cultural connotations within literary works. Their research is based on a self-compiled parallel corpus of *The Joy Luck Club*, comprising the original English text and its two Chinese translations. Using corpus tools, they conducted a comparative analysis of the translation styles exhibited by Cheng Naishan's version and the joint translation by Li Jun and Zhang Li at lexical and syntactic levels.

The authors note that, to date, no prior study has systematically compared the translation styles of these two versions using corpus methods. Their analysis reveals that Li Jun and Zhang Li's translation demonstrates higher lexical richness and textual density, with more complex paragraph structures and greater informational load, resulting in relatively higher reading difficulty. In terms of translation technique, their approach shows less adaptation to target-language conventions, adopting a generally foreignizing strategy that retains much of the original work's literary texture. In contrast, Cheng Naishan's translation exhibits less lexical variation, a higher degree of generalization, and more concise paragraphs, contributing to lower reading difficulty. Cheng's translation employs numerous domestication-oriented techniques, including combination, omission, amplification, and word-order adjustment, and makes frequent use of four-character neologisms and idiomatic expressions. Overall, her version aligns more closely with the literary style and cultural context of the target language while maintaining proximity to the source text's cultural background.

3. Methods

3.1 Introduction

This chapter elaborates on the overall research question and discusses the overall research design. Subsequently, it explains the data collection process, including the data sources, how comparative study is made, and the collection of qualitative data. Next comes the data analysis, where the author describes the process of analyzing qualitative data.

3.2 Research Design

This study initiates by compiling a corpus of Chinese internet neologisms from the social media platform Red Note. These neologisms, characterized by their spontaneity, creativity, and inherent arbitrariness, emerge organically from prolonged online interactions among users. They serve as linguistic markers that reflect the communicative habits and digital culture prevalent within the Red Note community. Furthermore, the analysis of these terms provides a window into the dynamics of contemporary Chinese online society, offering external observers a more authentic representation of its evolving social landscape.

Employing a qualitative research methodology, the study aims to identify the most appropriate translation strategies for these neologisms. The process unfolds in several structured phases: First, the collected neologisms are systematically retrieved and categorized. Second, initial translations are generated using machine translation tools, such as Youdao, to preliminarily analyze their semantic background and contextual definitions, thereby establishing a foundational understanding. Guided by Newmark's translation theory, the research then critically examines and classifies the translation strategies applicable to these terms.

Subsequently, the machine-generated translations are queried within the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA) to examine their contextual usage and collocational patterns in authentic English-language environments. Finally, through detailed contextual analysis, the adequacy of the machine-translated outputs is evaluated. Based on this evaluation, the study synthesizes findings to propose the most suitable translation approaches and strategy recommendations for different categories of Chinese internet neologisms.

3.3 Data Collection Progress

3.3.1 Data Resource

This study first selects 2024 internet neologisms from the social media platform Red Note. Subsequently, based on the original text of the internet neologisms, corresponding translations are retrieved from the Youdao translation. Finally, the contexts are found in the COCA corpus based on the search results from Youdao translation.

3.3.2 Data Collection

The data collection method is content analysis. First of all, input “2024 yearly Chinese neologisms” into Red Note to search for results and there are 61 posts in all. The Chinese neologisms cover many fields like science and technology, economy and culture. However, it is inefficient to read all the posts over and waste of time to collect neologisms. Then screen out and rank 10 posts according to the number of “likes”, which represents the popularity degree and browse number among netizens on Red Note. Subsequently, 4 posts are picked out after screening out the repetitive posts. Therefore, there are 9 Chinese internet neologisms in total finally and these neologisms are diverse in form.

After obtaining 9 Chinese internet neologisms from the search results on Red Note, they were classified according to their respective characteristics. Some of them are newly created, which means they never occur before and some of them have new meanings. Subsequently, the Chinese internet neologisms on Red Note are translated using machine translation tool such as Youdao Translation. Then the translation strategies are studied under the guidance of Newmark’s translation theory. Next, the contexts of the translations are obtained from the COCA corpus so as to verify the translations.

The world’s largest English corpus is corpus of contemporary American English (COCA) total amount of neologisms collected from nearly four hundred million neologisms. The American English corpora from 1990 to the present include texts of various types such as spoken English, novels, popular magazines, newspapers and academic ones. This corpus is updated every six to nine months.

Given that the quantitative and qualitative analysis of neologisms translation in COCA’s ultra-large-scale corpus can be conducted using this corpus. Therefore, if the translation of the neologisms cannot be determined in machine translation, the COCA corpus should be used for further verification. The candidate translations for the COCA verification stage have been determined by Youdao and Baidu translation. Searching these translations in COCA will yield their word frequency statistics. Meanwhile, translators can also obtain the sentence and context of the searched neologisms as well as related information. For internet neologisms that Youdao translation cannot provide translations of, translators need to verify from multiple sources, such as asking colleagues, consulting experts, and looking up professional dictionaries and websites, etc. The final translation is determined through the analysis of the contexts. Translation validation based on corpora is a common method for verifying the actual usage of a translation in the target language context.

Therefore, in data retrieval, there are two steps: Firstly, determine the starting stage of neologisms search. This stage should be determined based on the translator’s familiarity with the neologisms to be translated; Secondly, determine the stage of selecting and operating network resources. On the basis of determining the starting stage of neologisms search, the translator should select specific network resources or translation platforms according to their availability and authority. After meeting the two conditions of availability and authority, they should be used as the selection criteria for network resources or translation platforms, and authoritative network resources should be given priority.

3.4 Data Analysis

In chemical analysis, qualitative analysis refers to determining which chemical elements and compounds are present in an unknown substance sample, while quantitative analysis refers to determining the content of each element or compound. Similarly, qualitative analysis of concept translation refers to determining the expression methods of a certain concept in English, while quantitative analysis refers to determining the frequency of use of these different expression methods in English, so as to select the most accurate, commonly used and most in line with English habits expression method (Li, 2006). In terms of translation, qualitative analysis seems to refer to the final determination of the translation. This determination can be based on quantitative analysis. In terms of the relationship between quantitative and qualitative analysis, quantitative analysis comes first and then qualitative analysis.

Youdao translation is a very popular translation software in China that has recently become prosperous and is highly favored by young people. Currently, it has nearly 400 million users. Its most distinctive feature is the online definition function, which provides sufficient accurate materials for intermediate and advanced translators and language learners to identify the correct usage of vocabulary. Another feature is the integration of a richly detailed encyclopedia, allowing users to browse extensive knowledge while searching for words. The source of Youdao’s translation database is based on a large amount of Chinese information, including a huge number of Chinese-English translation examples. Therefore, it can better handle Chinese-English translations (Ji, 2018).

The methodology of this study mainly adopts a combination of content analysis, descriptive translation and qualitative comparative. At the beginning of the research, no preconceived research conclusion was set. Firstly, the research object is determined as the Chinese internet neologisms of the social media Red Note for the year 2024. Then, keyword searches are conducted on Red Note, and the results were sorted based on the number of likes and excluded those with duplicate posts. Finally, a total of 9 Chinese internet neologisms were selected. According to content and characteristic of each Chinese internet neologisms, analysis is conducted to classify them, so as to have a deeper and intuitional understanding. Next, the translations of Chinese internet neologisms are carried out using Youdao translation and translation strategies are analyzed under the guidance of the Newmark’s Translation Theory.

4. Findings

In this chapter, the author first classifies internet neologisms in Red Note, then search for according translations in Youdao translation. Next the author analyzes translation strategies of them and continue to compare the translations in COCA corpus so as to summarize the most appropriate translations and translation strategies.

4.1 Category of Neologisms

After searching and analyze of yearly neologisms in Red Note, they can be classified into two categories, one is old words with new meanings and the other is newly created words.

Therefore, neologisms which are in the category old words with new meanings are: 躺平、草台班子、红温、蝻蝻. Next, neologisms which are newly created words are: 已读乱回、班味、社死、city 不 city、0 帧起手.

4.2 Translation Strategies of Neologisms in Machine Translation

After searching for the translations in Youdao and Baidu Translation desperately, the results are shown below:

Table 1. Translations of neologisms in machine translation

Neologisms	Youdao Translation
躺平	Lie flat
草台班子	A makeshift troupe
红温	Red wine
蝻蝻	cricket
已读乱回	Read and replied randomly
班味	Smell of toil
社死	Social death
City 不 city	City or not city
0 帧起手	Start from frame 0

As shown in Table 1, the neologism “躺平” means lying flat on the bed or couch, but now on the internet, it means nowadays, life status of young people in China. They do not strive for anything in work and do not want promotion in work because for them, more salary means more work. Therefore, they can go back home as long as their work is done and their leaders cannot ask them for extra work. In Youdao translation “躺平” is translated into “lie flat”. It is literal translation of semantic translation in Newmark’s translation theory. This neologism describes the status of young people in society nowadays.

“草台班子” originally means a group of people that perform in rural areas or small towns. They have few members and their props and sets are rather crude. However, today in social media, this word means leaders in many industries are not as professional as people thought before. And many decisions they make are not thoughtful at all, which may cause bad results. In Youdao translation “草台班子” is literally translated into makeshift troupe of semantic translation, which has its original meaning but does not convey the current meaning. Apparently western readers cannot understand the deep meaning of it.

“红温” is translated into “Red wine” in Youdao translation. However, this neologism originally means high temperature and currently means someone is angry after scheme and plot are exposed. Apparently, none of Youdao and Baidu translation convey the true meaning of this word but simply literally translate it. It will cause obstacle in communication.

People has first impression of “蝻蝻” is an insect and Youdao literally translate it into cricket. However, as a neologism in Red Note that netizens often use, “蝻蝻” has new meaning, which is gossip and whisper someone when he or she is not on the scene. “蝻蝻” now not only has new meaning on the internet but also transforms from noun to verb.

Neologism “已读乱回” is a new created word means reply to someone with nonsense or randomly except right answer. It transforms form the word “已读不回” means do not reply to someone although seeing the message. And “已读乱回” is translated literally with semantic translation into read and reply randomly in Youdao translation.

Neologism “班味” is a new created word means when someone works everyday without rest and life. He or she seems to do not have hope for life. “班味” describes the heavy work so that someone does not have his or her own life. It also reflects helpless status in society. In Youdao translation, “班味” is translated into “smell of toil”, which is used literal translation of semantic translation.

“Social death” is the translation of “社死” in Youdao translation. Youdao uses literal translation of semantic translation. “Social death” is a noun and a fact but “social suicide” is a fact. Factually, “社死” is short of “社会性死亡” means someone’s secret is found by others, causing awkward situation, which does not have any meaning of “death” or “suicide”.

Neologism “city 不 city” is a new created word which is widely used in Red Note recently. It is a neologism that someone shows off to others about his or her fashionable clothes or item. Because urban area is more bustling than rural area, besides, people and clothes are more fashionable than that in rural area as well. Therefore, netizens use this neologism to show off and highlight fashion of what they eat and wear. In Youdao translation, “city 不 city” is used literal translation of semantic translation to translate into “city or not city”.

“0 帧起手” is a neologism, created by netizens and often used in Red Note. It is used to describe a sudden and unprepared condition. Therefore, its deep meaning is too sudden to prepare for. Literally, it usually reminds people of videos and films because “帧” is a term in video and film field. Therefore, “0 帧起手” is translated into “Start from frame 0” in Youdao translation. Youdao translation translates it

from the perspective of film with literal translation of semantic translation.

4.3 Comparative Study between Machine Translation and Corpus

Translation of neologisms in machine translation will be input into corpus COCA to find out word frequency and context of them. COCA is an authority reference where authentic and standard expression and usage can be found. Therefore, through reference of COCA, the most and appropriate used translation of neologisms can be found out.

“躺平” is translated into “lie flat” in Youdao translation, and input “lie flat” into COCA corpus. The first context is: *by his mouth, untying the knots on his face. Let the shoulder lie flat, legs stretching up. # The candlelight has gone.* The second context is: *it the kind of drawing you would produce if you had three human beings lie flat on the ground and outlined them with chalk or masking tape?* And the third context is: *Alternate legs throughout the set. # The Lying Single Leg Extension: Lie flat on a mat and then draw in your knees so that they make a 90-degree.* All the three contexts mean body condition, and have nothing to do with the feeling of no-care and living status of young people nowadays. Therefore, under the guidance of Newmark’s translation theory, in order to let western readers better understand life attitude of young people. It should use free translation of communicative translation to translated this neologism into “escape the rat race”. Therefore, input “escape the rat race” into COCA corpus, one context shows that: *cached out on her condo, and moved back to smalltown Washington to escape the rat race and be closer to family. She'd landed the job at Hanford.* This phrase shows that do not want to compete in big city and want a relax life attitude, which conforms more to “躺平” than “lie flat”.

“A makeshift troupe”, the translation of “草台班子” cannot find any context in COCA corpus. Therefore, such expression is not used by western people. Besides, “A makeshift troupe” does not convey the deep meaning of unprofessional and temporary group of people. So free translation can be used to translate “草台班子” into “fly-by-night operation” of communicative translation. And the context in COCA corpus is: *a drunk driver with nine arrests the keys to a company car? Not some fly-by-night operation, but the United States government.* It highlights the characteristic of unprofessional and amateurish, which is used by western readers so that they can understand deep meaning of this neologism, readability is promoted as well.

Next is the neologism “红温”, which is translated into “Red wine” in Youdao translation. Obviously, this is an inappropriate translation. “红温” means someone is angry when his plot is exposed, which has nothing to do with “Red wine”. Factually, “see red” is an appropriate expression western people may use. In COCA corpus, there are contexts: *That's it, you rolling piles of scrap. You made me see red! I'll make you see black and blue! And It should make you really angry. This makes me see red. I am pissed off, not for myself, but for any woman who...* Obviously, “see red” conforms to deep meaning of “红温”, which is angry and “红” matches “red” well. Thus, free translation of communicative translation is suitable to be used to make it readable for western readers.

Obviously, “cricket” in Youdao translation is inappropriate and does not convey the true meaning of “蛐蛐” which has meaning of whisper and gossip about someone when he or she is not on the scene. Therefore, it can be used literal translation of semantic translation to convey the deep meaning to western readers. So “gossip” is appropriate to be the translation of “蛐蛐”.

“已读乱回” is a new created word, which means you do not reply the right answer he or she wants to hear, sometimes even nonsense. And it is translated into “read and reply randomly” in Youdao translation. However, there is no result in COCA corpus, which means such expression does not used by western readers. And it is not a standard expression obviously. Therefore, free translation of communicative translation should be used so that more standard and authentic translation can be found. “Witty response” is an appropriate translation and in COCA corpus exist some contexts: *Before she could think of a witty response, the bartender came over and placed a glass of cranberry juice in front... and ... and who was proud of it. I thought maybe I'd even find some witty responses to all those questions I've been getting. Instead, I found an....* Therefore, “witty response” is more appropriate and standard expression that western readers can understand.

“社死” is short of “社会性死亡”, which means someone is very embarrassing because what he or she has done or his or her secrets found by others. “社死” does not mean true death so translation “social death” in Youdao translation is inappropriate. Therefore, literal translation of semantic translation should be used so that western readers can comprehend deep meaning behind “社死”, which is awkward in front of people. In COCA, input “social blunder” and some contexts can be found: *Dorry also comes to Marianne's aid when she commits one of her social blunders when in front of a stranger she asks her brother and her sister-in-law why they... and These cautionary tales illustrate how digital communications can go wrong and go viral. Social blunders like these are commonly caused by carelessness, false assumptions or unchecked emotions.* From contexts above it can be seen that “social blunders” can convey the meaning of embarrassing and awkward.

“city 不 city” is a code-mixing, new created word with English and Chinese, actually means a sense of fashion. However, in Youdao translation, the expression “city or not city” would make western readers confused. Besides, there are no matching strings of “city or not city” in COCA. Therefore, such expression can be replaced with “fashion or not” and in a context it shows: *Chanel was something dowdy for middle-aged women who had no sense for fashion or not the bodies to wear it, huh?* Where “fashion” is a noun like “city” in “city 不 city”. When a western people is asked “fashion or not”, he or she can easily comprehend like a Chinese people is asked “city 不 city”.

Also, “0 帧起手” is a code-mixing neologism with number and Chinese. It means someone’s action is too sudden to react. And it is translated into “start from frame 0” by Youdao translation with literal translation. However, such expression is not used by western people and they cannot understand deep meaning of this neologism like Chinese people. Besides, in COCA exit no matching records of it. Thus “0 帧起手” should be translated with free translation of communicative translation, which is “out of nowhere” and in COCA there are

many contexts that: *...I was headed towards you when the flames just appeared out of nowhere...* and *...Suddenly, seemingly out of nowhere, the lady came near me with the camera...* Apparently, “out of nowhere” has the meaning of quite sudden and hard to react so western readers can have the same feeling with Chinese readers.

4.4 Discussion

Chen’s (2023) study identifies that Internet neologisms exhibit specific linguistic features, and drawing on the skopos theory of translation, proposes that such terms can be rendered through strategies including literal translation, free translation, transliteration, ellipsis, and hybrid translation. However, the study falls short of offering a categorical differentiation of the neologisms in question, thereby limiting the applicability and precision of the proposed translation strategies due to the absence of a typological framework.

Therefore, in this study, neologisms can be classified into old words with new meanings, including deviation of meaning and shift of characteristic. The other is newly created words, which includes abbreviation and code-mixing.

It can be known from the form above, in 9 internet neologisms there are 5 of them are translated with free translation, 4 of them are translated with literal translation.

Therefore, appropriate translations with suitable translation strategies are studied and then verified in the contexts in COCA corpus so that the translation conformed to reading habits of target readers can be summarized and translation strategies can also be concluded.

In most cases, free translation is used while Chinese internet neologisms have similar expressions in target language. Besides, literal translation is used while Chinese internet neologisms have correspondent expressions.

As a bridge of communication, translation plays an important role while people from different cultures want to know each other’s. Chinese internet neologisms consist of ideas, usage of language and culture of Chinese netizens thus people from another language would know what Chinese internet neologisms convey through translation. Meanwhile, they can also have the similar even the same feeling with source readers with different and appropriate translation strategies.

Therefore, in the contexts that target readers use in COCA corpus, translations of different neologism can be summarized and translation strategies can be analyzed. Free translation is used when similar expression exists in target language. And literal translation is used when there is same expression in target language.

5. Conclusion

5.1 Findings

After comparative study, it can be found that most of neologisms are literally translated by machine translation. Because the characteristic of arbitrariness and not in the normal Chinese system, it undoubtedly brings difficulties to translation. However, with more and more people use internet neologisms, they will gradually integrate into normal language system.

Because most of the neologisms are created or given new meanings by netizens to promote fun when communicating, machine translation cannot translate them accurately. And many translations cannot be found on COCA corpus, which means western readers cannot have same feeling as Chinese readers when encountering the same neologism. Undoubtedly, it will bring obstacles to cross-culture communication.

Therefore, it is necessary to refer to authoritative corpus so that standard usage of words can be found. Furthermore, most of neologisms should be translated by free translation, considering different culture so that western readers can easily comprehend neologisms as Chinese readers do.

However, due to quantitative limitation of neologisms, there is no way to study all the neologisms. Therefore, this study has some defects to a certain extent. The author hopes this study will provide some reference to scholars working on the same research so that translation of internet neologisms can be gradually improved.

5.2 Limitations

This study primarily utilizes Youdao Translation as the machine translation tool to generate preliminary English equivalents for Chinese internet neologisms sourced from Red Note, while employing the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA) as the principal benchmark for verifying the contextual appropriateness and naturalness of these translations. However, several methodological constraints should be acknowledged to ensure a more rigorous and comprehensive analytical framework.

Firstly, reliance on a single machine translation engine may limit the diversity and adequacy of translation candidates. While Youdao Translation is widely adopted, it is not necessarily the most authoritative or accurate system available. To enhance the robustness of the initial translation pool, future studies should incorporate multiple machine translation platforms—such as Google Translate, DeepL, and Baidu Translate—to generate a broader spectrum of possible renditions for each neologism. Comparative analysis across these outputs would allow for a more nuanced evaluation of translation variability and potential semantic or pragmatic divergences.

Secondly, although COCA serves as a reputable and extensive corpus representing contemporary American English usage, exclusive dependence on it may not fully capture the linguistic preferences or acceptability across different varieties of English or within specific digital communication contexts. Cross-validation with other authoritative corpora—such as the British National Corpus (BNC), the Global Web-Based English (GloWbE) corpus, or specialized corpora of online and social media language—would provide a more

comprehensive basis for assessing whether a proposed translation aligns with the reading habits and communicative norms of diverse target reader groups.

Therefore, to increase the validity and generalizability of findings, subsequent research should adopt a multi-source and multi-corpus verification approach. This entails: Generating candidate translations from several machine translation systems to compile a more representative set of options. And validating these candidates against multiple large-scale, genre-balanced corpora to evaluate their frequency, collocational patterns, and contextual suitability across different registers and geographical dialects of English.

Such an expanded methodological design would not only strengthen the reliability of translation evaluations but also contribute to a more nuanced understanding of how Chinese internet neologisms can be effectively integrated into cross-cultural digital communication.

Furthermore, the pervasive use of Chinese internet neologisms on social media platforms introduces significant barriers to cross-cultural communication, particularly as an increasing number of international users engage with platforms like Red Note.

First, translation inadequacies present a primary challenge. Foreign users often cannot decipher the meaning or contextual significance of these neologisms when employed by Chinese netizens. This issue is compounded by the fact that many non-native users already struggle with comprehending standard Chinese, making the additional layer of informal, rapidly evolving slang particularly opaque.

Second, numerous Chinese internet neologisms are deeply embedded within unique cultural, historical, or social contexts that lack direct equivalents in other cultures. This cultural specificity creates a substantial communicative gap, as shared referential frameworks are absent between speakers from different cultural backgrounds.

Finally, this communicative asymmetry is bidirectional. When foreign users attempt to engage using these terms without full cultural-linguistic understanding, they risk misapplication or inappropriate usage. This not only hinders their self-expression but can also generate confusion or misunderstanding among Chinese users, thereby obstructing meaningful dialogue.

Consequently, without strategic mediation—such as contextual explanation, culturally adaptive translation, or metalinguistic guidance—the very lexical innovations that enrich intra-cultural discourse can paradoxically render cross-cultural communication exceedingly difficult on these increasingly globalized social platforms.

Acknowledgements

In this regard, I wish to convey my deepest and most sincere gratitude to my supervisor and co-supervisor. From the beginning to the end, they offered me the most appropriate advice. Although there still exist many problems, under the guidance of supervisors and endeavor of mine, the research will become more and more meaningful.

Authors' contributions

Dr. Salina and Dr. Ng were responsible for study design and revising. Dr. Sun Zibo was responsible for data collection and drafted the manuscript and Dr. Salina revised it. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

Funding

Not applicable

Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Informed consent

Obtained.

Ethics approval

The Publication Ethics Committee of the Sciedu Press.

The journal's policies adhere to the Core Practices established by the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE).

Provenance and peer review

Not commissioned; externally double-blind peer reviewed.

Data availability statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy or ethical restrictions.

Data sharing statement

No additional data are available.

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