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英汉翻译策略研究

Vague Language in International Business English  
and Its E-C Translation Strategies

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# 国际商务英语中的模糊语言及其英汉翻译策略研究

## 摘 要

模糊性是自然语言的属性之一，研究角度各异。本文意在研究国际商务英语中的模糊语言及其英汉翻译策略研究。首先作者通过分析商务交际中出现的大量例子，对其中模糊语言的积极和消极语用功能做出了总结。最后结合纽马克的翻译观从语用功能和词汇角度讨论国际商务英语中的模糊语的英汉翻译策略。

作者将国际商务英语中模糊语言的英汉翻译策略分为两类：第一类是用相对应的译语的模糊表达来翻译源语中的模糊表达；第二类是在翻译时做适当的变化，如添加或者省略，以及其他一些调整，但不影响原意。就以上提到的翻译策略而言，第一类是一种语义翻译，第二类是交际翻译。我们还可以在实际翻译中把语义翻译和交际翻译相结合来实现翻译的对等。以上英汉翻译策略中最重要的一点是：译出信息所表达的语用功能必须与原语信息的语用功能相一致。

作者提出此英汉翻译策略是为了帮助译者更好、更准确的翻译国际商务交流中出现的模糊语言。此外，作者对一些商务英语中常用模糊语言作了详细的整理和总结，并提供出相应的中文翻译，以便读者更好地了解其翻译方法。本论文目的是帮助人们更有效地翻译那些在国际商务英语中频繁出现的模糊语言。

**关键词：**国际商务英语；模糊语言；英汉翻译策略

# **VAGUE LANGUAGE IN INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS ENGLISH AND ITS E-C TRANSLATION STRATEGIES**

## **ABSTRACT**

Vagueness, as an attribute of natural language, has been studied from various aspects with different approaches. This thesis explores the vague language in international business English and its E-C translation strategies. Firstly, the author has analyzed the positive and negative functions that vague language has in international business English based on the data collected. At last the author has put forward E-C translation strategies for vague language in international business communication from pragmatic and lexical perspectives based on Newmark's translation theories.

The translation strategies for vague language in international business English are classified into two types in this thesis. The first is that vague language in the original language is rendered vague in the target one. The second is by using addition, ellipsis, and some other changes. As far as the translation strategies are concerned, the first strategy can be viewed as a semantic translation, the second, as a communicative translation. We can also combine the semantic and communicative translation together, thus realizing the effect of translation--- equivalence. The most important point in my E-C translation strategies is that the translated information should have the same pragmatic functions as the source one.

The author has proven that the E-C translation strategies for vague language are useful to help translators have a successful translation of vague language. The author has also listed some typical vague expressions in international business communication as examples for readers to learn how to translate those expressions well into Chinese. This thesis aims to help people translate those frequently-used vague expressions in IBE into Chinese more efficiently.

**KEY WORDS:** international business English; vague language; E-C translation strategies

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# **Chapter 1     Introduction**

## **1.1 Research Motivations and Objectives**

### **1.1.1 Motivations**

The author chooses to study the vague language in international business English and its E-C translation strategies mainly for the following reasons:

1. Vague language extensively exists in human languages and vague linguistics has become an important discipline which offers a special perspective for us to view languages. So far, lots of researches have been done in the fields of international business communication and vague language respectively but not in the combination of the two. This situation has long been existing due to the fact that people tend to think business language must always be precise and exact to avoid future disputes. In this thesis, the author tries to prove the factual existence of vague language and discuss its pragmatic functions in international business English.
2. The study by combining vague language and international business communication may suggest some practical meanings. This study aims to explore the pragmatic application of vague language in business communication and tries to achieve a better and deeper understanding of it, which may give some hints to the businessmen or interest them in how the successful ones use vague language to realize their communicative purposes.
3. With China's entry into WTO and the growing tendency towards economic globalization, English, as a most frequently used medium in communication, plays a vital role in all kinds of international business, such as foreign trade,

international marketing, financing, shipping, and insurance. As the author mentioned above, vague language has special pragmatic functions both in English and Chinese business communication. In order to get successful business communication, we should master the E-C translation strategies for vague language in international business English should be discussed from pragmatic and lexical perspectives.

For the above three reasons, the author chooses this topic and tries to do a comparatively systematic research on the vague language and its E-C translation strategies of international business English.

### **1.1.2 Objectives**

English used in international business communication is chosen as the target data. All data (120) are collected from books and articles on business English written by experienced teachers and businessmen. The present study mainly aims to explore the adoption of vague language in business communication and tries to answer the following questions:

1. What are the pragmatic functions of vague language in international business English?
2. What is the linguistic realization of vagueness in international business English?
3. How to translate vague language in international business English into Chinese from pragmatic and lexical perspectives?

## **1.2 Organization of the Thesis**

This thesis aims to analyze vague language in IBE and its E-C translation strategies. It consists of six chapters.

The first chapter gives an introduction, a brief description of this study, including search motivations, objectives, data collection and overall structure of the thesis.

The second chapter is literature review on vague language and translation strategies of vague language in China and abroad. Working definitions of vague language and international business English are also mentioned in this chapter. Then the author makes a comparative analysis of vagueness, generality, ambiguity and fuzziness.

Chapter three focuses on the pragmatic functions of vague language in international business English. Chapter four is the linguistic realization of vagueness in international business English from the lexical perspective.

Chapter five and Chapter six will discuss the E-C translation strategies for vague language in international business English, classifying the translation strategies into two types from the pragmatic perspective. The first is that vague language in the original language will be rendered vague in the target one. The second is by using addition and ellipsis. The most important point in this chapter is that the translated information should have the same pragmatic functions as the target one. The author tries to study all above E-C translation strategies for vague language to help other translators improve their translation so as to guarantee businessmen to get a successful business communication and avoid misunderstanding of translated information.

Chapter six lists some typical vague language in international business communication with translated versions of Chinese. This part aims to help people translate the frequently-used vague expressions more efficiently.

Chapter seven is a conclusion, summarizing the main points and implications in the study. At the same time, some limitations and suggestions are provided for further research.

## **Chapter 2     Literature Review**

### **2.1 Vague Language and Its Translation Strategies**

Vague language is very common in language use. Nowadays more and more people begin to realize the existence of vague language. Many scholars and researchers have studied vague language. Over the past decades, extensive efforts have already been made in the study of vague language and its translation of vague language. Following are some books and papers dedicated to the study of the above-mentioned field.

#### **2.1.1 Vague Language**

Many people think that the good usage of language involves clarity and precision. Hence, it is believed that vagueness would destroy communication and it should be avoided. I.A Richards points out the traditional rhetorician believes that vagueness is false in natural language and should be limited or eliminated, while the present rhetorician believes that vagueness is the inevitable result of the natural language, which can not be avoided. (Wang Xianpei,1999). Actually, vague language is frequently used in our communication and sometimes is an advantage, while most of us do not notice vagueness unless the language appears inappropriate. Both precision and vagueness are characters of the natural language; the dialectical unity of vagueness and precision would make the natural language more flexible and diversified.

Vague language refers to the vagueness of language and it can also refer to the language units: vague words or expressions or vague structures. Vague language padded unnoticed until some linguists argue that it is worthy of description. Vague language is an interdisciplinary subject, which involves a number of disciplines, such as philosophy, psychology, sociolinguistics, pragmatics, cognitive linguistic and



semantics. Vagueness has become an interesting area of research for many scholars and researchers.

From the aspect of philosophy, it was Plato who laid the foundation for what later became fuzzy logic, indicating that there was a region, which is beyond truth and falsehood. Bertrand Russell (1923) is the first one to discuss fuzziness in the ancient paradox. For example, “She is a beautiful woman.” In reality, the concept of “beautiful” is fuzzy. Some Chinese think that a woman who has big eyes and small mouth is beautiful. However, Julia Roberts who has a big mouth and red hair is called the most beautiful woman by most Americans. There is no way to define “beautiful”. Take “I’m trying to get slim.” for instance. It is difficult to say how many kilograms means slim. As fatness was regarded as beauty in Tang dynasty, the girls who were slim in Tang might be fatter than girls in modern society. So fuzziness in the concept is inherent and intrinsic, because it shows the lack of sharp boundaries in any conditions. The study of vague language from the aspect of philosophy aims to make clear the reasons that lead to vagueness of natural language, the nature of vagueness, and the ways to handle it.

From the aspect of psychology, Deese (1974) holds that vagueness of communication is inherent in the structure of our ideas, rather than in the language system. Crystal and Davy (1975) give four reasons for vagueness: (a) memory loss; (b) the language has no suitable exact word; (c) the subject of the conversation is not such that it requires precision; (d) the choice of vague item is deliberate to maintain the atmosphere.

From the cognitive point of view, vagueness can be understood in two ways: firstly, the world has been constantly changing and developing, which makes quite new demands on language to reflect it. Secondly, many things in the world which language reflects are themselves vague, or perceived as vague. Ullmann (1962) attributes vagueness to four factors: (a) genetic character of words; (b) meaning is never

homogeneous; (c) lack of clear-cut boundaries in the non-linguistic world; (d) lack of familiarity with what the words stand for. (c) "Lack of clear-cut boundaries in the non-linguistic world" implies the non-linguistic world is vague. In the 1980s and 1990s, linguists got into a deeper investigation of vagueness from the aspect of cognitive linguistics. In 1981, McCawley (1981) expressed his semantic view by using "fuzzy membership" and also did much in research on the combination of cognitive linguistics and vagueness. Williamson (1994) argues that fuzziness is a cognitive phenomenon, which is the reflection of human's mind about the real world of which we lack knowledge.

In addition, there is a large quantity of fuzzy wording in communication, which has aroused great interest of scholars in studying vague language from the aspect of pragmatics. Brown and Levinson (1987) in their treatment face work suggest that hedges can be used to avoid presuming or assuming that anything involved in the FTA is desired or believed by the H (hearer). In her monograph of *Vagueness Language*, Channell (2000) suggests that fuzziness "cannot be handled except by looking at both semantics and pragmatics" and that the pragmatic side should receive more attention because fuzzy expressions "seem to be more inherently 'pragmatic' in nature than many others indeed, it has been suggested that some of the expressions are almost semantically empty and that their interpretation has to be handled entirely within pragmatics" (Channell, 1994:20). In her study, Channell shows how English provides its speakers with a great variety of ways of being vague. She applies principles of pragmatics and some other notions in pragmatics, such as the conversational implicature and scalar implicature, to the analysis of vague expressions, describing both the linguistic forms and the pragmatic consequences of their use.

The above scholars and linguists have made great contribution to the study of vagueness from different aspects. However, the systematic study of fuzziness is not available until the American scientist L.A. Zadeh put forward his *Fuzzy Set Theory* in 1965. He observes that some objects in the real world do not easily fit into the

linguistic categories available for describing the universe. He suggests that fuzziness can be formally handled in terms of a fuzzy set, a class of entities with a continuum of grades of membership. Zadeh's theory broke through the long-time standing concept of "two-valued logic" and made vagueness phenomena become a science and generated lots of studies.

Since the study of vague language is a developing discipline, it needs more studies from different perspectives. This thesis will take a more pragmatic perspective to analyze this intrinsic and important linguistic feature---- particularly the pragmatic functions in international business English, which is English especially related to international trade.

## **2.1.2 Translation Strategies for Vague Language**

### **2.1.2.1 Translation Strategies for Vague Language Abroad**

Translation, expressing the meaning of the source language by the target language, is one of the most significant ways of intercultural communication between people speaking different languages with distinct cultural backgrounds. Language contains a good deal of vague language. Translation involves the transfer of meaning between two languages, and consequently has much to do with the vague language. Since vague language has becoming an increasingly interesting linguistic topic in the world, more and more scholars focus on the research of vague language and its translation strategies. Research on vague language also gives new perspective to the study of translation.

Actually translation of fuzziness also plays a very important role in vagueness translation. As we all known, before and after Zadeh, linguists like, Russell, , Channell and etc. all use the term vagueness instead of fuzziness. According to

Kempson(1977), one type of vagueness is fuzziness in which the categories of independent items have no clear-cut boundaries. In fact, a unified term addressing this property of language is still lacking because it has not been settled. That is to say, vagueness is a matter of degree has no-clear-cut boundary or no definite criteria or has a continuous range of values. The term “vagueness” covers the meaning of “fuzziness”. About the translation of fuzzy language, the idea of fuzzy equivalence is also presented by many foreign scholars as fuzziness is prevalent in the process of translation for two facts. For one thing, translation involves expressing the same idea with two different languages. The fuzziness of language, in its explicit or implicit form, inevitable has its impact on this process. As a result, the rendering could not be a precise one. For another, translation, as a kind of mental activity, cannot be devoid of the interference of the translator. The personal experience of the translator would more or less influence his understanding of the original, and decide his preference of wording in representation. This will lead to the epistemological fuzziness of translation and the idea of fuzzy equivalence and help us deal with the prevalent fuzziness in translation.

By fuzzy equivalence we mean that in translation, the target text does not convey the precisely identical meaning of the source text, though these two do have a major part of meaning overlapped. To explain the fact with the theory of fuzziness, we can say that the rendering is a fuzzy equivalence of the original, with the essential meaning of the source text playing the definite core. Fuzzy equivalence is also a kind of “dynamic” and “functional” equivalence, and a good number of scholars in translation have done a lot of research on this aspect. For example Nida’ s “dynamic” and “functional” equivalence.

#### **2.1.2.2 Translation Strategies for Vague Language At Home**

Many modern Chinese scholars also devoted themselves to the research of translation theories of vague language. Most of them combined vagueness with translation since

1980s, and a series of related articles or books have been presented since then. According to statistics on CNKI, numbers of articles on vague language and translation amount to more than 205 since 1999.

Wang Dongfeng, laid his emphasis in the research of the vagueness caused by cultural default. Cultural default is “defined as absence of some cultural background knowledge shared by the author and his or her intended reader”. “What is transparent to the source language reader in terms of cultural default is often opaque to the target language reader, the translator included” (Wang Dongfeng,1997:46-49). Cultural default is a culture-specific phenomenon in communication inside the same cultural context. Therefore, receptors with different cultural background will have the vacuum of sense, while they come across such cultural default. The existence of cultural default shows that translation is not only a bilingual activity but also a bicultural activity. The translators should know clearly about the vagueness caused by cultural default, and make a correct judgment of the background knowledge of his intended readers--- the readers in the target language.

Huang Binyun (2002), Shen Kuiliu, Wu bozhen (2004) and Xiao Yunshu (2001) pointed out that the translation of vague language should be based on pragmatic equivalence and relevance theory. They also put forward some translation strategies for vague language: (1) vagueness for vagueness; (2) addition for vague language; (3) deletion for vague language; (4) some slight changes for vague language. Translation strategies for vague language were classified into four types by Yu Fubin (2002) and Mao Ronggui, Fan Qiuwu (2005): (1) precision to vagueness; (2) vagueness to vagueness; (3) vagueness to precision; (4) precision to precision. Wei Xiaopu (2005) studied the vagueness and its translation in legal language. Translation strategies in his paper are addition, deletion, literal translation and combination. Literal translation and liberal translation were pointed out by Cheng Tongchun (2002) and Zhang Mei (2004).

## **2.2 A Working Definition of Vague Language**

The phenomenon of vagueness in language was first noticed more than 2000 years ago in ancient Greek. In the following two thousand years, however, it remained almost unnoticed until the linguistic turn of western philosophy took place in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Since the birth of Zadeh's Fuzzy Set Theory in 1965, vague linguistics has gradually evolved into an independent discipline. Linguists have made arduous work to the development of a systematic subject of it. And the philosophical study on vagueness of natural language brought about the curiosity about this phenomenon in the linguistic circle. For example, much effort has been made by linguists to define the confusing terms, such as fuzziness, ambiguity, generality and vagueness. Therefore, the comparison of some confusing terms and the definition of vague language in this thesis are presented in this part.

Interest in vague language use and its meaning has been aroused in a number of disciplines: literary criticism, linguistics, psychology and philosophy. Although a large amount of literature exploring vague language has been published and various kinds of researchers have been carried out, there is rarely one definition that can gain consensus in the linguistic circle. One reason for this difficulty is that vague language is a complex area of study, and there are a number of different conceptions of vague language. Therefore, there is a need to delimitate and define the research object of the current study at a point of departure since it is not intending to be all-inclusive and the present study towards the definition of vague language based on the definition by Channel (2000:20) is as follows:

**An expression or a word is vague, if:**

**A. it can not generate any definite meaning even by context (situational or linguistic) or**

**B. it is purposely and unabashedly vague to be used to achieve certain**

## **communicative intention.**

The following analysis of vague language in Business English will be strictly based on the above working definition.

## **2.3 Distinguishing Fuzziness, Generality and Ambiguity**

Because of the vague nature of language, it is not easy to define vague language. Many linguists made great efforts for this purpose only to find they were confused as to distinguish vagueness from other related terms, namely, fuzziness, ambiguity and generality which all convey indeterminacy. Though continuous attention has been paid to and certain achievements have been made, no universally accepted notion has been reached. Based on the work of domestic and overseas linguists, the author hopes to present the understanding toward the clarification of the following terms.

### **2.3.1 Vagueness and Generality**

Zhang Qiao (1998,13-31) defines generality as “the meaning of an expression is general if it does not specify certain details, i.e. generality is a matter of unspecification”. But Wu Yaxin (2002) maintains that if we use unspecification here, it would be difficult to draw a demarcation line between generality and vagueness. Her definition is as follows: “an expression is general if it is the superordinate to other relevant expressions, which are considered as its hyponym”. For example, “Mary received a degree” is general and causes an unclear meaning if the audience wants to know whether Mary has an art degree, or a science degree, a BA degree, or a PhD degree.

Hyponymy which refers to the vertical relationship existing between a specific lexeme and a general lexeme is characterized by generality, for example, “rose” and “flower”.

The semantic field of “rose” lies within “flower”. In this case, it is clear to see “rose” belongs to “flower”. Sometimes generality is a means and vagueness is the result of it. For example, a girl who is expecting her boyfriend to send her a rose says in vagueness by using the general terms: “How I wish someone to send me a flower.”

### 2.3.2 Vagueness and Ambiguity

Theoretically speaking, it is not difficult to separate vagueness from ambiguity but in practice confusion arises surprisingly. As for their respective connotations, ambiguity refers to that an expression has more than one competing and distinct interpretation, while vagueness is just on the contrary---no distinct meaning can be found in a vague expression, let alone more than one. Therefore, polysemy and homonymy can cause ambiguity, not vagueness. Kempson (1977) and Shi Anshi (1988) share similar ideas in this regard. The following are two examples in point invented by Chomsky and that have been quoted by many linguists:

(1) Flying planes can be very dangerous.

(A: 这架飞着的飞机很危险。)

(B: 驾驶飞机很危险。)

(2) We saw her duck.

(A: 我们看到了她的鸭子。)

(B: 我们看到她迅速低下头。)

The first example is ambiguous as “flying planes” can be planes that are flying or a behavior to fly planes, which meets the criteria for ambiguity. The second example is also ambiguous because “duck”, a polysemy, can be a noun meaning a kind of poultry or a verb meaning to lower one’s head quickly, to avoid being seen or hit. The example “The weather is good.” is vague, for we can not tell how good the weather is



from this sentence and no determinacy is conveyed. “She has a good leg” however is ambiguous as “good” can mean healthy, athletic or beautiful, etc, but such an ambiguous sentence can have an exact meaning when a given situation is offered as its context. The difference between vagueness and ambiguity hence is clearly illustrated with the reference of the above examples.

### **2.3.3 Vagueness and Fuzziness**

These two terms have been used interchangeable by some investigators. In an effort to distinguish fuzziness from other terms, Zhang Qiao (1998) holds that “an expression is fuzzy if it has a characteristic of referential opacity”. This definition agrees with our understanding of fuzziness. We take an expression as being fuzzy only if it lacks borderline when its meaning is considered. For example, in the expression “about 20 students”, while its general meaning “20 plus-or-minuses” may not be fuzzy, when we try to work out its denotation, however, a gray peripheral area may occur. Is “15” in the boundary of “about 20”? The answer varies from context to context, from individual to individual.

But before and after Zadeh, linguists like Russell, Channell and etc. all use the term vagueness instead of fuzziness. In fact, a unified term addressing this property of language is still lacking because it has not been settled. Generally speaking, Kempson (1977) classifies vagueness into the following four types.

( I ) Referential vagueness, where the meaning of a lexical item is in principle clear enough, but it may be hard to decide whether or not the item be applied to certain objects;

( II ) Indeterminacy of meaning, where the meaning of an item itself seems indeterminate;

(IV) Lack of specification in the meaning of an item, where the meaning is clear but is only generally specified;

(V) Disjunction in the specification of an item's meaning, where the meaning involves an either-or statement with different interpretation possibilities.

According to the classification, we will classify vagueness into three types since the fourth type of vagueness is not related to our discussion in this paper. One: vagueness is fuzziness in which the categories of independent items have no clear-cut boundaries. For example, we do not have defined criteria to distinguish the referential boundary of expressions like "city" or "town"; "mountain" or "hill". This type of vagueness is represented when more than two categories are compared. Two: vagueness is borderline case vagueness in which the uncertainty concerns the fringes of application of a word. For example, how tall is "tall"? How small is "small"? The borderlines of these words are not clear, which can not be determined in the same context but varies in different contexts. For instance, "Is 170cm tall for a female model?" This type of vagueness is a continuous degree in one category or in one item. Three: vagueness is the indeterminate meaning arising from uncertainty or indefiniteness in a phrase or proposition. For example, "Jake's bus" is determinate because we can not decide whether it is used to describe the bus Jake designed, the bus he owns, the bus he drives, the bus he goes to work on, or the bus he is going to catch and etc.

To sum up, vagueness is a matter of degree which has no clear-cut boundary nor definite criteria but has a continuous range of values. The term "vagueness" covers the meaning of "fuzziness". We should say, as for vagueness, it is used in its broadest sense. We take this viewpoint as the basis of our present discussion in this paper. In the following analysis, we use the term vagueness for convenience.

## **2.4 Summary**

As the object of my study is translation strategies for vague language, I have firstly introduced literature reviews of vague language and its translation strategies. I also have provided a working definition of vague language and delineated the distinctions of some related notions. Next chapter I will focus on pragmatic functions of vague language in IBE.

## **Chapter3 Pragmatic Functions of Vague Language in IBE**

So far, many linguists have already accepted to the assumption that all kinds of discourses in natural language including international business English are more or less vague; both vagueness and precision are the innate characteristics of nature language. We all know that vague expressions are used for particular and diversified communicative purposes. Indeed, vague language is not bad or wrong, nor is it inherently good. Its use needs to be considered with reference to contexts and situations, in which it will be appropriate or inappropriate. Ullmann(1962) noticed the paradoxical functions of vagueness in discourse. He argues, "The vagueness of our words is a handicap in some situations and advantage in others."

In China, Wu Tieping (1999) and his followers have done a lot of work on the functions of vagueness. In the light of functions of vagueness, Chen Zhian (1997:21) classifies vagueness as positive and negative. Vagueness is an inevitable concomitant of ordinary linguistic communication. Business English is not especially imprecise, with some sources of vagueness present also in most other roles of discourse. By using vague expressions, businessmen can operate successfully in a purposive communication. Vagueness may turn out to be a powerful propagandist device in promoting product sales. However, there are also contexts where vague expressions are used to confuse others intentionally, which may give rise to misunderstanding.

In this chapter we will explore on the positive and negative functions that the vague language has in international business English with the data collected. The positive functions of vague language can be condensed into several aspects: contributing accuracy, enhancing the flexibility, deliberately withholding information, mitigating the face-threatening effects, and self-protection. We will study the E-C translation strategies from the pragmatic perspective based on this analysis of pragmatic functions in International Business English.

### **3.1 Positive Functions of Vague Language in IBE**

Philosophers of ordinary language, particularly Ludwig Wittgenstein, take “vagueness to be a constitutive component of natural language, of crucial importance for its efficient usage.” (Ballmer, Pinkal, 1991) This high estimation of vagueness led Wittgenstein and his followers to the rejection of classical logic as well as other formal frameworks as a means to describe natural language. Schaff (1962) argues as follows: “Communication requires the vagueness of words. A complete elimination of the vagueness of words would make our language a great deal poorer. This is not a declaration against precision in making statements and against the endeavor to eliminate the vagueness of words and the resulting misunderstandings, but it does draw attention to the objective limits of such a procedure”. Schaff’s argument highlights vagueness as a positive role in communication. Therefore, vague language does not obstruct linguistic communication. As a matter of fact, it facilitates discussion and creates conviviality. Communication requires vagueness, so does international business communication. Vague expressions are often deliberately chosen for their contribution to the messages conveyed by businessmen. Basically, in international business English, positive roles of vagueness hinge on the following.

#### **3.1.1 Contributing Accuracy to International Business English**

This seems to be contrary to the characteristics of vagueness. Since there are context in which it is important to use language with as much precision as possible. “Quite often when one sets out to make a term more precise, it will turn out that the term he employs to remove the vagueness in question will themselves be vague, though perhaps to a lesser degree and/ or in different respects”(Alston, 1964). However, linguistic communication does not only require precision or accuracy, but also requires vagueness. Because there are situations in which one finds it unnecessary to be very precise or accurate, one may make use of vagueness deliberately. In this respect, vague terms or expressions are commonly used. Sometimes, one may find

that it is impossible for him to be accurate, or he has some difficulty in expressing himself in an exact way, he may resort to vague language to carry on the communication smoothly.

In objective reality, there are too many “boundary phenomena”. In other words, things and phenomena that belong to objective reality manifest indeterminacy. Vagueness is sometimes an important means of accurately stating or expressing these indeterminate, uncertain things and phenomena. Vagueness and precision is a dialectical unity. Generally speaking, accuracy is one of the pre-requisites for transmitting true information. Therefore accuracy is one of the pre-requisites for business English. In international business English, there are some contexts in which accurate information requires precision, but there are also contexts in which accuracy is attributed to vagueness. Take a commercial advertisement for example:

(3) Alpha-hydroxyl acids are known to be effective in retexturizing even skin damaged by photoaging (which dermatologists report causes up to 80% of premature aging) as they speed natural exfoliation. You’ll see telltale dark spots virtually disappear!

( $\alpha$  羟基酸可加速老化皮肤的自然脱落，对皮肤的活颜焕彩有很大功效，甚至可以击退皮肤的光老化问题。皮肤学专家们称接近80%的皮肤老化问题都源于光老化。使用此款化妆品后您将看到斑点几乎消失。)

In each case, “up to” and “virtually” act to qualify the predicate intensity or the validity of the state of affairs expressed in the message. The example indicates that vague expressions “up to” and “virtually” weaken the force of categorical commitments or arbitrariness, thus helping to guard against possible refutation, but meanwhile enhance the accuracy of expression, as they suggest greater accuracy in conveying the sense in which the information may be held to be true. So, the advertiser ensures that he is meeting the requirement to be ‘legal, honest, decent and truthful’ by using vague language such as “virtually” and “up to”.

### 3.1.2 Enhancing the Flexibility of IBE

A principal feature of vagueness is indeterminacy. Vague language is relatively elastic and flexible. Vagueness can be employed to minimize categorical commitments. In business activities, when the replies to some questions are beyond your authority or it is the improper time to answer the question, the use of vague language may be considered as a good choice because it can offer you a relatively flexible space to move back and fro. And sometimes the vague language diminishes the writer's or the addresser's personal responsibilities for misleading or cheating the readers or the audience. That is to say, those vague languages can help minimize the writer's or the addresser's personal involvement and thereby reduce the probability of refutation. J. Channell argues that "vagueness may be used as a safeguard against being later shown to be wrong". Vagueness may also serve as an insurance to help writers to preserve their reputations and limit the damage. For example:

(4) It is at the disposal of the board. We'll give you our reply as soon as possible.

(Chen Chujun, 2004:99)

(这个问题由董事会负责处理。我们会尽快给您答复。)

(5) It seems that your quotation is acceptable. (Chen Tongchun, 2000:76)

(看来你方的报价是可以接受的。)

The vague expression in example (4) serves as stalling tactics although the addresser promises to replay "as soon as possible". The board's opinion and the result of the disposal can be manipulated flexibly by the addresser according to actual situation.

The vague words "seem" and "acceptable" in example (5) is the same as in example (4). No definite meaning of acceptance or refusal can be got from the vague words, which give certain freedom for the addresser in the business exchange. The purpose is to let the addresser interpret message the way he wants to and then give the addresser

the leeway for further change according to the market fluctuation.

From the analysis of the above examples, we can see that through the flexible manipulation of vague language, the addresser may have the initiative in business transaction. At the same time, the use of vague language can make the tone sound cordial which will enhance the cooperation between the two parties.

### 3.1.3 Deliberately Withholding Information

As discussed previously, vague words and expressions are characterized by being too general and lacking specific details. In this sense, vague expressions in international business English serve the purpose of withholding information on the part of the addresser, especially in the replies to inquiries. One important reason for not answering the inquiries is that the addresser does not want to provide the required information in order to hold an advantageous position in the future negotiation. For example:

(6)

Dear Sir,

We note from your letter of May 30 that the price offered by us for the subject article is found to be on the high side. While we appreciate your cooperation in giving us the information about the Japanese supply in your market, we regret to say that there is no possibility of our cutting the price to the extent you indicated, i.e. 8%. For your information, we have received a crowd of inquiries from buyers in other directions and expect to close business at something near our level. At present, we cannot see our way clear to entertain counter-offer, as our price is quite realistic. If later on you see any chance to do better, please let us know. In the meanwhile, please keep us posted of developments at your ends. We assure you that all your inquiries will receive our prompt attention.



a. We note from your letter of May 30 that the price offered by us for the subject article is found to be on the high side.

(从您 5 月 30 日的信中我们获悉, 我们对主要产品的出价对您来说似乎 偏高。)

b. For your information, we have received a crowd of inquiries from buyers in other directions and expect to close business at something near our level.

(供你方参考, 我们已经收到了 大批来自 其他地区许多买主的询盘, 可望 基本按我方价格水平成交。)

c. At present, we cannot see our way clear to entertain counter-offer, as our price is quite realistic.

(现在我们的价钱已经 很低了, 没法接受你方还盘。)

From the above example, we can see that except for the exact sentence “there is no possibility of our cutting the price to the extent you indicated, i.e. 8%”, the addresser uses vague language, especially the sentences in italics of which the vague meaning is more obvious.

We can find no mentioning of how much money the addresser offers which is considered to be “on the high side” by the addressee in the above example. The vague words “at something near our level” do not give us the exact price of the goods. The addresser also uses “a crowd of” and “in other directions” to describe the large number of customers which can be seen as a hint of the popularity of the goods and the vague words “quite realistic” serve as the prelude of the following refusal of lowering price.

As we all know, in actual business transactions, businessmen always try to deliberately withhold information, especially the price of the goods for the reason that once the price is given to the customer, it is impossible to change. Therefore, businessmen often opt for vague words to express the price especially when

answering the customers' inquiries. Vague words give both the businessmen an opportunity to change the price once they offer in midway and the customers an implication that the price is easy to be changed so that customers can make right response to the price.

### 3.1.4 Mitigating the Face-threatening Effects

As we have mentioned in the Face Theory, "face" is a universal concept connected with emotion. No matter what kind of culture an individual comes from, he/ she has the desire to protect his/ her face from being threatened. At the same time, he/ she tries to satisfy other's face-wants in order to keep communication going on smoothly. In reality, those face-threatening topics can not be totally shunned. In such cases, what the language producer would concern most is to find an appropriate way and corresponding linguistic devices to mitigate the face-threatening effects. Vague language may be one of the good ways.

For instance, one usually expects others to share his opinion. Once his ideas are opposed to, his positive face would be threatened. Therefore, in order to facilitate the success of communication, some strategies should be considered by the language producer to lessen the effects on his interpreter's positive face. Vague language can contribute to this.

(7) Much as we should like to do business with you, we fear we can not supply with such reasonable quality at the price you ask. (Li Xi, 2006: 57-59)

(虽然本公司非常乐意与贵公司做生意, 但我们恐怕不能依照贵公司所要求的价格提供此等好货。)

This is a refusal of establishing business relationship. The addresser is sure that establishing business relationship at the price the addressee asks is impossible, but in

order to relieve the unwelcoming effect, the addresser takes the addressee's positive face into consideration and intentionally adds vague words "we fear" to his negative answer. Thus, the harshness of the sentence caused by disagreement may be mitigated. As a result, the answer sounds somewhat tender and softer to the addressee, and becomes more appropriate and may be easily accepted.

### 3.1.5 Self-protection

Some business activities are verbal communication. And verbal communication is a social action in which we not only need strategies to make our verbal behaviors polite with regard to fact-wants of our counterparts so as to maintain the happy atmosphere and avoid discomforts, but also need some strategies to protect ourselves from others' changes. In most of English business correspondence, the deliberate use of vague language can be seen as resulting from the addresser's desire to protect himself/herself from potential criticism on the part of the addressees. Vague language allows the addresser to anticipate possible negative consequences of being proved wrong and refer to speculative possibilities while at the same time avoiding direct personal responsibilities for their statements.

Channell (2000) states that vague language may be used as a safeguard against being later shown to be wrong. Due to this property of vague language, the addressee, when he has read vague expressions or words, can not decide exactly what is referred to by the addresser and it is up to the addressee to interpret what the addresser means. Thus, the addresser takes advantage of using vague language to reduce the risks of what he says. For example:

(8)

In reply to your letter of 28 October, we would say that we have transacted business with the firm in question since March 1995. During the last twelve months we have

received eight orders, none of them exceeded US \$4,600. Originally, the firm paid on invoice but for the last two years we have accepted payments on statement. All accounts have been settled promptly. We have no reason for thinking that this firm is conducting its business unsatisfactorily or is not acting in good faith in asking credit from you. We must add, however, that the large amount of credit requested surprises us and would seem to be excessive in relation to the apparent size of the business.

(Liu Yongqiang, 2003:94)

a. In reply to your letter of 28 October, we would say that we have transacted business with the firm in question since March 1995.

(就此回复您 10 月 28 日给我公司的信件。我公司从 1995 年 3 月开始就与 该公司 有贸易往来。)

b. We must add, however, that the large amount of credit requested surprises us and would seem to be excessive in relation to the apparent size of the business.

(然而 必须强调的是, 要求 那么多的信贷确实令我们 出乎意料。)

Example (8) is a letter of credit. Before writing this letter, the company should ask the other side to give a voucher from whom the company can get the real credit situation of the other side. The voucher's reply is very difficult to write. And what the voucher said may influence the cooperation between the two parties involved and what he said must be in line with the fact, without any distortion. Whether the one in investigation has a good credit or not, it is difficult for the voucher to write a reply for avoiding any absoluteness and responsibility.

The above example is just a reply of this kind. In order to protect himself, the voucher uses vague expression "the firm" to refer to the one in investigation instead of giving the real name. In the sentence "we must add, however, that the credit requested surprises us", the voucher uses the word "surprise" to hint that the business scale is too big and it may exceed the normal financial level. Then he uses vague language

“would seem to” to express that the amount of credit requested by the one in investigation is much bigger than its apparent size. Therefore, we may conclude that the addressee probably will not do such a big deal of business with the one in investigation through the voucher’s vague expressions used in this letter. But neither the one in investigation nor the addressee will ascribe the business failure to the voucher.

Reducing some commitment to certain facts is another important aspect of self-protection. Since vague language enables the addresser to explain his/ her utterances in flexibly changing ways, it may help the addresser escape from assuming the responsibility caused by his/ her utterances; in other words, it may reduce the addresser’s commitment to the truthfulness or exactitude of what he/ she says. When making a statement, the addresser has to be responsible for the information carried out by the statement. The addresser could try to reduce his/ her commitment to the truth of the statement through adopting vague language as a communicative strategy. The following example will serve as an evidence.

(9) Our vessel S.S “Fengqing” is expected to arrive at Vancouver around November.

(Wu Yiping,2006:58)

(我方“风情”号货轮大约11月底抵达温哥华。)

Here the addresser consciously adds the vague word “around” to the statement. In this way, the degree of determinacy is reduced and the whole sentence becomes more flexible. Provided this answer was wrong, in other words, it was not the 15<sup>th</sup> of November, but the 16<sup>th</sup> of November of arrival, the responsibility of the addresser’s wrong answer would be relieved to some extent. Otherwise, the addresser has no way to absolve himself/ herself from the responsibility.

### 3.2 Negative Functions of Vague Language in IBE

Just as everything in the world has two dialectical sides. Vague language is not always positive or desirable. There are contexts in which vague language may have a negative effect in international business English. Hence, the businessmen may not be able to distinguish which is true information and which is false information and are led into difficulty. For example:

(10) A: Will you please quote for the supply of approximately 100 reams of white poster paper suitable for auction bills and poster work generally?

(Wu Yiping, 2000:74)

B: ...

(A: 恳请贵公司上报 大约 100 连, 质优的白报纸价格, 此等白报纸适合于一般拍卖广告和海报纸张之用。

B: ...)

The example (10) is a request for quotation. (A) uses vague word “approximately” to modify the number of poster papers, however, under this circumstance, the vague word may make the opposing party (B) feel confused about how to give the quotation. As we know that in real business transactions, quotation fluctuates with the number of goods you ordered. “Approximately” does not give the exact number of the order and (B) may have several interpretations of the number, which may be less than one hundred or more than one hundred. From this vague word, it is impossible for the businessmen to give the quotation. If the quotation (B) gives is out of (A)’s reach, the business transaction is doomed to fail, and if the quotation (B) gives is lower, he may suffer financial loss because there are so many uncertain factors which may affect the price.

From the example above, we can see that under some circumstances, vague language does not give (A) an edge in business communication, however, it may lead to trouble

for the parties involved. Therefore, it is important that in actual practice, we should use vague language in English business communication which can help the businessmen realize some communicative purposes or make the communication go smoothly and avoid the negative functions of vague language.

### **3.3 Summary**

This chapter mainly talks about the pragmatic functions of vague language in international business English. Businessmen sometimes use vague language because it can bring out certain pragmatic functions to help them achieve certain communication purposes.

Through analysis of the above examples, it is proposed that vague language should have two pragmatic functions: the positive functions and the negative functions. The pragmatic functions of vague language in international business English communication can help the businessmen understand that in some situations, vague language can bring out positive functions which may be helpful for their further cooperation and other situations are not the same, vague language in these situations will lead to misunderstanding or cheating. So we should make full use of the positive functions and avoid the negative functions when adopting vague language.

As pragmatic functions exist in all languages, pragmatic equivalence should be paid more attention to translating. In this paper, the most important point in my E-C translation strategies is that the translated information should have the same pragmatic functions as the source one. More details will be presented in Chapter 5.

## Chapter 4 Linguistic Realization of Vagueness in IBE—Lexical Vagueness

Owing to the vagueness of human being's thoughts and the vagueness of expressions, vagueness can be found almost everywhere in international business communication. We all know vagueness is one of the main characteristics of language. It is a deep-rooted characteristic, which can not be neglected or changed. Just as Zhangqiao says: "the words have no other choices but to be vague." (1998:48). Vagueness can be found at all levels of language. In this chapter we explore the linguistic realization of vagueness in international business English and the different forms of vague expressions in international business English.

Lexical vagueness is common in communication, especially in international business communication. Lexical vagueness includes round numbers, plural nouns, comparative degree and superlative degree, conjunctions, modal auxiliary verbs, modal lexical verbs, adjectival, adverbial, and so on. Proper use of the lexical vagueness in international business English can make the expression more flexible and acceptable.

### 4. 1 Round Numbers

In English, some numbers are exact but they can have vague meanings in specific situations, hence they are called round numbers. For example, Tom is six feet tall. We can presume from this sentence that Tom is exactly six feet tall or Tom is actually six and a quarter of an inch. So the round numbers can be both vague and precise. So when these numbers generally refer to the meaning of many or much, they are a kind of vague expressions. In our Chinese we can use the “成千上万”, “上千”, “上百”, “数千” to refer to round numbers, while in English, we may use “*millions of*”,



“*thousands upon thousands*” etc. Below are some examples in international business communication:

(11) In respect to the price of hand tools we quoted last week, if you can improve the quantity to a much bigger one, say *several thousand sets* for each item, we are glade to give you some discount. (Li Xi,2006:58)

(我公司上周对手工工具的报价，若贵公司能大幅提高订货数量，即一个品种定几千套，我们乐意给一点折扣。)

(12) We have sold our products to *dozens of* countries. And *hundreds of* companies have placed orders with us ahead of you.

(我们的产品远销到很多国家，在您之前已有许多公司下了订单。)

## 4.2 Comparative Degree and Superlative Degree

The use of comparative degree and superlative degree of adjectives and adverbs serves to make a described object vague, as firstly, most adjectives and adverbs except for a few connoting such absolute values as “dead” or “alive”, tend to be essentially vague in nature, thus naturally generating vagueness in their comparative or superlative form, and secondly, the comparative and superlative words of “*more*”, “*less*”, “*most*”, “*better*”, and “*best*” are vague concepts themselves, for there is no way of telling the exact extent to which an adjective or adverb goes in being thus modified. And as a result of the vague nature of comparative and superlative degree words, relevant messages conveyed inevitable sound and are vague. For instance:

(13) Can you shed some light on the *lowest* price you can accept?

(您能透露一下您可以接受的最低价格是多少吗?)

(14) But can't you find some way for an *earlier* delivery?

(您能否用其他途径早点交货?)

- (15) Having a wide and varied experience in the trade, we are convinced that we are in a position to take good care of your import business as a buying agent in the most effective manner.

(我公司在贸易方面有着极为丰富的经验, 作为代您的采购代理商, 我们会采用最行之有效的贸易方式, 对贵公司的进口贸易认真负责。)

### 4.3 Modal Auxiliary Verbs

Although not totally comprehensive or categorically watertight, the scheme below represents the most widely used vague expressions in communication. Modal auxiliary verbs (the most straightforward and widely used means of expressing modality in international business communication), the most tentative ones being: *may, might, can, could, would, should*:

- (16) It might have been caused by some other factors, such as moisture loss.

(这也可能由其他因素引起, 比如受潮损失。)

- (17) Handling an impasse

A: We seem to have reached a stalemate. We are not going to process unless you can make us a better offer.

B: We might be able to offer something better, but on one condition.

A: What's that?

B: You should have to guarantee us a fixed order every month for a year.

A: We might be able to do that, as long as we feel you are the right supplier for us.

B: Ok. If you give us this guarantee, we would be prepared to reduce our prices by 15%.

(A: 我们好像陷入僵局了。除非你出价更优惠, 不然其他的我们免谈。)

B: 我们可以再你些优惠, 但是有个条件。

A: 什么条件?

B: 你必须保证一年内每月都有固定的订单。

A: 只要你是好卖家, 我们才可能答应你。

B: 好。只要你保证, 我们就会给你 15%的折扣。)

However, in this business negotiation, comparative degree “better” and adjective “right” are both vague words.

## 4.4 Modal Lexical Verbs

Modal lexical verbs (or the so-called speech act verbs used to perform acts such as doubting and evaluating rather than merely describing) of varying degree of illocutionary force: *to seem, to appear, to believe, to assume, to suggest, to estimate, to tend, to propose, to speculate, to argue, to indicate, to mean*, and so on. Although a wide rang of verbs can be used in this way, there tends to be a heavy reliance on the following examples.

(18) (Handling an impasse)

We seem to have reached a stalemate.

(我们似乎陷入了僵局。)

(19) I think the price is still on the high side.

(我认为这个价钱还是偏高。)

## 4.5 Adjectival, Adverbial and Nominal Modal Phrase

- a. probability adjectives such as *possible, probable, un/ like*;
- b. adverbs (which could be considered as non-verbal modals) such as *perhaps*,

*possibly, probably, practically, likely, presumably, virtually, apparently.*

c. nouns such as *assumption, possibility, probability* and so on. Let's look at some examples:

(20) But can't you find some way for an earlier delivery? You see if we place our goods on the markets at a time when other importers have already sold their goods at profitable prices.

(您能用其他方式尽早交货吗？不然等我公司把商品投入市场时，其他进口商已经卖了个好价钱。)

(21) Is it possible to deliver the goods in June?

(六月份能交货吗？)

(22) This time I intend to place a large order but business is almost impossible unless you give me discount.

(我公司计划要下一大比订单。除非你方提供一定折扣，不然不可能成交。)

## 4. 6 Approximators of Degree, Quantity, Frequency and Time

There exist a number of ways of being vague about quantities in English, that is, something is added to precise number or numbers, or using a vague quantifier such as *approximately, roughly, about, often, occasionally, generally, usually, somewhat, somehow, a lot of.*

(23) A: How many suppliers do you have for these special and competitive goods?

B: They are approximately three in your market.

(B:在你方市场大约有三个。)

(24) We have examined all the cartons one by one, and found nearly each of them was

leaking more or less.

(我方逐个检查了所有包装箱，并发现几乎每件都有或多或少的破损。)

(25) As to the steamers sailing from Hong Kong to San Francisco, we have bimonthly direct services.

(我们每两月有一次从香港到旧金山的船运服务。)

All these are examples of approximations which contain some lexical vagueness (such as about, approximately) which leads to the approximation reading. These will be called “approximators”. Structures like those above suggest that they designate not precise numbers or quantities, but rather intervals of numbers whose extent is apparently not exactly specified. These expressions are in wide use, and despite their vagueness, it is clear that they present no problems of understanding. *About, around, round, approximately, or, or so* appear to be interchangeable in most examples, and indicate that the same effect on the meaning of an approximation. They appear as modifiers to a number and they always appear before number. The effect of “adding” these words to a sentence containing a number is to make it vague as to exact quantity involved. There is another set of expressions which specify upper or lower limits for quantities on the number continuum. Some of these are *at least, at most, (no) less than, (no) more than, within, under, without and so on*. These vague expressions of figures and quantities are used in business communication frequently. As round numbers, proper use of them can make the expression more flexible and acceptable. For example:

(26) Our company has two direct sailings within a month from Shanghai to Hamburg.

(我公司每月有两次从上海到汉堡的直航。)

(27) Secondly, we have sold at least 1800 every seven weeks.

(第二，我公司每 7 个星期至少卖 1800 个。)

## 4.7 Other Expressions

In addition to the forms of vagueness mentioned above, international business English also sees the presence of other vague words or expressions that serve the purpose of being exhaustive. These words or vague expressions are categorized herein separately as first: they share the same vague feature of being exhaustive, and second: it seems both unnecessary and somewhat unwieldy to list them under separate categories as a result of the first reason. One common case that falls into this category is the large number of prefixes and suffixes, which play a pivotal role in the development of English and make English language more expressive while enlarging the English vocabulary. Prefixes and suffixes can be vague as some of them signify a vague extent, range, variance, or category. It is worth pointing out, however, that not all prefixes and suffixes are necessarily vague in meaning, as some affixations indicate a define meaning or meaning, like “dis-” in “disabuse” or “bi-” in “bipolar”. Other cases besides the affixes involve nouns, adjectives, adverbs and verbs. Some examples will be shown to make this part clearer.

(28) Where the export of weapon-related items and technologies is submitted to the State Council and the Central Military Commission for approval, our company can not make any decisions.

与武器有关的物资及技术的出口，须报国务院、中央军事委员会批准，本公司没有决定权。

(29) Upon discovering the posset that fail to meet requirements such as leaky or overweight bottles, the selling enterprise shall make proper disposal and shall not put them on the ship.

如果发现漏气或超重的瓶装牛乳酒，销售公司应妥当处理，不得运货上船。

(30) We have effected insurance on this consignment against All Risks and War Risks for total US \$ 550 000 to minimize losses. (Wang Yuzhang,2003)

为减少损失, 我方以为这批货物投保了价值为 55 万美元的一切险和战争险。

In the first example, “-related” is one commonly and frequently used to describe any possible phenomenon and cover all the possibilities, as in the invented examples “missile-related” and “national security-related”. And “overweight” in example (29), in which the prefix “over-” determines in large measure the vague identity, saves the trouble and the impossible task of giving a definite weight. And in the last example in this chapter, “minimize”, a verb that also contains the prefix “mini-”, suffices to put across the good intention of “reducing losses to the utmost extent”, the expression which, by the way, happens to be another translation and vague as well.

## 4.8 Summary

The examples of linguistic realizations of vagueness in IBE have been shown in this chapter, to help people get a better understanding. In chapter 6, the author will list some typical vague lexicons with translated versions of Chinese according to this chapter. That part aims to help people translate those frequently used vague language more efficiently.

## Chapter 5 E-C Translation Strategies for Vague

### Language Based on Newmark's Translation Theories

In my linguistic research in chapter 4, vague language has been described both from a pragmatic and a lexical perspective. As we all know, positive pragmatic functions of vague language would help people to communicate easier in business. Now I want to take vague terms in IBE as examples and talk about how to translate them from English into Chinese. I will introduce Newmark's translation theories firstly in this chapter.

#### 5.1 Translation Methods for Vague Language Based on Newmark's Translation Theories

As my proposed E-C translation strategies are based on Newmark's translation methods, some related ones will be introduced in this part. The terms "semantic" and "communicative" are used by Peter Newmark (1988) in his book *A Textbook of Translation*, in which he comes up with the following gradation:

SL emphasis	TL emphasis
Word-for-word translation	Adaptation
Literal translation	Free translation
Faithful translation	Idiomatic translation
Semantic translation	Communicative translation

*Figure 5.1*

Semantic translation (ST) is personal and individual, follows the thought processes of translators, tends to over-translate, pursues nuances of meaning, yet aims at concision in order to reproduce pragmatic impact. Communicative translation (CT) is social,



concentrates on the message and the main force to the text, tends to under-translate, to be simple, clear and brief, and is always written in a natural and resourceful style.

A ST is normally inferior to its original, as there is both cognitive and pragmatic loss. ST differs from “faithful translation” only in as far as it must take more account of the aesthetic value of the SL text, compromising on “meaning” where appropriate so that no assonance, word-play or repetition jars in the finished version. CT attempts to render the exact contextual meaning of the original in such a way that both content and language are readily acceptable and comprehensible to the readership. Only ST and CT fulfil the two main aims of translation, which are accuracy and economy. (Newmark, 1988:45-51)

Based on Newmark’s theory, equivalent effect is the desirable result, rather than the aim of any translation (Newmark, 2001:48). In both a semantic translation and a communicative translation, it is essential to achieve an equivalent effect. Communicative translation, being set at the reader’s level of language and knowledge, is more likely to create an equivalent effect than is semantic translation at the writer’s level. Furthermore absolute semantic translation or communicative translation should be avoided. That is to say, in the process of translation, a translator should combine the two translation strategies together effectively. The details of my proposed E-C translation strategies for vague language based on Newmark’s theories are in the following.

## **5.2 My Proposed E-C Translation Strategies for Vague Language in IBE**

The E-C translation strategies for vague language in IBE from pragmatic perspective are based on Newmark’s translation theories. The translation strategies used can be classified into two types: (1) vague language in the original language should be kept

vague in the target one; (2) such translation techniques as addition, ellipsis.

The above translation strategies are to realize pragmatic equivalence of one language into another. That is to say, the translated sentences or paragraphs should have the same pragmatic functions as the source ones. This important function of translation and vague equivalence should be central in my research.

### **5.2.1 Vagueness for Vagueness**

This strategy means using the same or similar vague expressions in the target language. If translators can find vague words or expressions in the target language, which are identical to the ones in the original language, they can use this strategy to translate them. This translation strategy is called vagueness for vagueness in this thesis. I will divide it into two types in the following paragraph.

#### **5.2.1.1 Keeping Exact Vague Words or Expressions in the Target Language**

English readers and Chinese readers generally share the same understanding of vague expressions both in meanings and pragmatic functions. Therefore, translators should keep the vague expressions in the target language to give the readers of the target language the same vague message. The translation strategy in this part is to use the exact vague words or expressions to replace the ones in the original language in order to reach equivalence. When translating such kind of text, a translator can use the equivalent vague expressions in the target language to render the vague expressions in the original language, thus maintaining the pragmatic functions of vague information in the original language. For example:

(31) 原文: We will prepare all the necessary documentation and present it to the responsible authority. And we'll do it well within three months.

试译：我们需要必备所有必需的文件，交给负责这一事物的人，并在三个月内办好。

Vague: do it well within three months ➡ 模糊: 三个月内办好

(32) 原文: Due to heavy demand, we can accept orders only for not more than three months delivery.

试译：由于需求量大，我们只能接受交货时间不超过三个月的订单。

Vague: not more than tree months ➡ 模糊: 不超过三个月

(33 ) 原文: Only by knowing the causes of disagreement can an exporter make a reasonable counter-offer.

试译：出口商只有了解到对方不同意报价的原因之后，才能提出合理的还盘。

Vague: reasonable ➡ 模糊: 合理的

(34) 原文: Ships may sink or consignments be damaged in transit, exchange rates may alter, buyers default or governments suddenly impose an embargo.

试译：船舶可能会沉没，货物在运输途中可能受到损坏，汇率可能会变化，买方可能会背信弃义拒不付款，政府也可能会突然实行禁运。

Vague: may ➡ 模糊: 可能会

Vague: suddenly ➡ 模糊: 突然

These examples indicate that vague expressions “well”, “within three months”, “reasonable”, “may”, “suddenly” are in the force of the writers’ categorical commitments, thus helping to guard against possible refutation, but meanwhile enhancing the accuracy of expression, as they suggest greater accuracy in conveying the sense in which the information may be held to be true. That is to say, all above vague words have the same pragmatic function. As a lot of words in Chinese have the same pragmatic functions as those in English. We can use the exact vague expressions in target language (Chinese) to translate them. In the above examples “well”, “within

three months”, “reasonable”, “may”, “suddenly” should be translated into “好”, “在三个月内”, “合理的”, “可能会”, “突然”.

(35) 原文: The modification of the law could presumably play an important role in market.

试译: 这项法律的更改 可能会 在交易市场中起重要作用。

Vague: presumably      ➡      模糊: 可能

The vague word “presumably” employed in (35) indicates an incomplete proposition, which makes the statement less assertive but more consultative. Furthermore, it carries an attitude of modesty and objectivity of the author. This word has such two pragmatic functions as contributing accuracy and enhancing the flexibility. All factors above are well delivered in the Chinese version, which is literally and functionally equivalent to the source text. In this sense, the translation could be considered as a faithful one. Furthermore, it should be pointed that, though classified as empty words, vague expressions tend to acquire their own meanings in a particular context. Therefore, as long as the function of the vagueness is equivalent, the translation can be acceptable.

#### 5.2.1.2 Making Slight Changes While Translating

The other strategy is to make some changes while the translator translates vague words and expressions into the target language. Or in other words, when a vague concept is used to express vagueness in the original text, the translator can make a little change or use a similar or even non-equivalent concept to express the vague one. Take the following as examples:

(36) 原文: The company was responsible for launching Star TV in Asia, racking up hundreds of thousands of subscribers in the first year.

试译：该公司负责在亚洲发送卫星电视，在第一年里的用户数就达成千上  
万。

Vague: hundreds of thousands of ➡ 模糊: 成千上万

In (36), the vague expression “hundreds of thousands of” means “many”. But in the target text, the translator does not think the meaning of “many (许多)” can convey the message of the original text. He uses “无数” to emphasize a large number of subscribers. Actually, the vague expressions “millions of”, “thousands of”, “thousands upon thousands...” and “a thousand” are also used to express the meaning of “many”, “a lot of”, while in the translated text, “千百万”, “无数” are used to express the same meaning.

(37) 原文：There are 30 million Chinese at home working to turn out the thousand and one things required to export.

试译：中国国内有 3 千万人在生产成千上万种出口商品。

Vague: the thousand and one ➡ 模糊: 成千上万

Since different nations have different cultural backgrounds, religious beliefs and language expressions, vague usage of numbers as the historical crystallization of the national culture has very distinctive national characteristics. In this example, if the expression of “the thousand and one” is translated into Chinese literarily as “一千零一”, it will have no exaggeration or figurative implication but only contains the precise numeral concept of “1001”. If it is transformed to “thousands of”, it will be more natural for Chinese. Derived from the Arabic *the Thousand and One Night*, the expression of “a thousand and one” in English implies “many”, while in Chinese “千” and “万” do the same trick.

(38) 原文：Some of employees in this foreign ad-agency are known to be no better than ours....In the old phrase it is six of one and half a dozen of the other...

试译：人们都知道那家国外广告中介公司的有些员工并不比我们的好……用句老话来说，也就是半斤八两……

Vague: six of one and half a dozen ➡ 模糊: 半斤八两

The idiom in English “six of one and half a dozen of the other” is appropriate for Chinese expression if translated into “半斤八两”.

More examples are:

(39) 原文: ... and much of this is available for only a modest amount of expenditure.

试译: ...只花费不太多的资金就可以得到许多这种统计数字和资料。

Vague: a modest amount of ➡ 模糊: 不太多的

(40) 原文: Finally, it would seem that certain administrations, striving for protection, end up by issuing standards of increasing complexity and exotic interpretation.

试译:最终, 看来某些政府设法采取保护措施, 结果颁发的标准日趋复杂, 其解释也日趋奇特。

Vague: it would seem that ➡ 模糊: 来看

### 5.2.2 Adaptation

As we have discussed before, vagueness is one of the most typical features of a natural language. However, according to different cultures, different social life and different situations, as much difference exists among different languages, there must be some difference in vagueness among different languages. Or in other words, the levels of vagueness are different in different languages. While translating, a translator should pay attention to the meaning of the vague words or expressions in the original language. If there is not any exact vague equivalence in the target language, the translator should make some flexible adaptations. In the following section, I will

discuss how to make changes in translation with two techniques: addition and ellipsis. And while making addition or ellipsis in the target language, the translator is recreating the text in target language---the method of communicative translation.

5.2.2.1 Addition

Sometimes a translator may make some addition to the vague concepts in his translation. For example:

(41) 原文: It's the quality that counts. Our curtains were and still are the best ones in Europe and probably in the world. You should take into consideration our curtains' superior quality.

试译: 这些窗帘物有所值。我们生产的窗帘过去是, 现在仍是欧洲最好的, 也许在是全世界也算得上最好的。您应该考虑一下我们上乘的质量。

Vague: were and still are the best ones      ➡      模糊: 过去是, 现在仍是最好的  
Vague: probably      ➡      模糊: 也许

The example (41) is a part of negotiation. As we all know, no matter what strategy is applied to the introduction of one's products, the key principle is to make it convincing and attractive with a view to increase the possibility of a potential transaction. In a descriptive language, alongside with exact numbers and specific terms, vague expressions are frequently used, which are more persuasive than exact data in certain cases. In this context, being impressive and persuasive is the priority for business communication.

The addition of two vague words “过去” 和 “现在” ensures that the target text readers receive as much information as the source text readers. Although no such words as “in the past” or “now” (equivalent to “过去” 和 “现在”) appear in the source text, the verbs “were” and “are” do tell different time and the translation just

succeeds in giving sufficient information by putting “过去” and “现在” in their position. In this example, vague expression “probably” is used to modify “the best” to make the utterance more objective and convincing. Without it, the expression may sound very subjective and absolute, which may arouse people’s doubt about the truth of the statement.

(42) 原文: Our company has a good advantage in marketing investment, supporting export commodity production, organizing scientific research and financing.

试译: 我公司在投资, 扶持出口商品生产, 科研, 金融等方面颇有实力。

Vague: a good advantage ➡ 模糊: 颇有实力

#### 5.2.2.2 Ellipsis

As what has been discussed in 5.3.2.1, sometimes the translator can also make some ellipsis while rendering the vague concepts of the original language to the target one. As different languages are rooted in their different cultural backgrounds and have different linguistic forms, very often the vagueness function in the source language is distorted in the target one. In other words, speakers of different languages may have different beliefs toward the same vague word. For example:

(43) 原文: I think it's probable for us to select a similar quality of black tea from other countries at a level about 10% lower than yours.

试译: A. 我想我们可能会选其他国家的红茶, 他们的价钱比你们低大约 10% 但是质量一样。

Vague: I think ➡ 模糊: 我想

Vague: probable ➡ 模糊: 可能

B. 我们可能会选其他国家的红茶, 他们的价钱比你们低大约 10%但是



质量一样。

Vague: I think      ➡      模糊: ／

Vague: probable      ➡      模糊: 可能

It is interesting that version B is more acceptable in Chinese. “Probable” has already conveyed the meaning of “uncertainty” of the speaker, and as a matter of fact, the vague expression “I think” appears unnecessary in most cases, since the speaker certainly expresses what is implied in “I think” without special reference to other sources.

It is argued that not being a marker of uncertainty, the vague expression “I think” also helps reduce the assertive tone and therefore its appearance is justified. In fact, if it is unlike the redundancy, being natural and unavoidable in language, it appears more like repetition or information overload in Chinese version. That is to say, this overload only leaves the concerned part emphasized in Chinese. “我想” or “我认为” tends to result in an emphasis on the part of the speaker himself/ herself, indicating his/ her self-confidence, as is quite different from what “I think” might do in English community. Therefore, ellipsis might distort the original meaning of the source text to a certain extent: the assertive tone has been strengthened rather than lessened.

I have emphasized that all the translation strategies should be based on pragmatic equivalence. That is to say, the translated sentences or paragraphs should have the same pragmatic functions as the source ones. In this case, we can use the role of pragmatic equivalence to select ellipsis or addition. For example::

(44) 原文: A: When will you send me samples of new products?

B: Sometime next week.

试译: A: 您什么时候发给我新产品的样品?

B: 下周。

Vague: sometime            模糊: /

### 5.2.3 Other Translation Strategies

In Newmark's opinion, only semantic and communicative translation can fulfill the two main aims of translation: accuracy and economy. However, he also mentioned that semantic translation and communicative translation must be seen as a whole. That is to say, in translation, sometimes translators should combine the two translation methods together effectively. Therefore, while translating vague language, apart from the methods I have discussed before, translators should also use precise concepts to replace the vague ones in the original language based on the situation or vice versa.

## 5.3 Summary

In this chapter, the author has discussed the E-C translation strategies for vague language in international business English. As language is the result of human civilization, different languages bear some resemblances. Although vagueness is one of the typical features of language, vagueness in different languages may also bear resemblance to some degree.

Thus in translation, if there are exact or even similar vague words or expressions in the target language, the translator should use them to replace the ones in the original. In this thesis I call it semantic translation. It is often the case that when there is no exact vague equivalence in the target language, the translators have to recreate the texts to make them acceptable to target readers. This is called communicative translation. Semantic translation and communicative translation are not separate. In most cases, a translator should effectively combine the two translation methods together. Or in other words, while translating, the translator should use precise

concepts in the target language to replace vague ones in the original language, or vice versa, thus reaching the effect of equivalence.

## **Chapter 6     E-C Translation Strategies for Vague Lexicons in IBE**

In Chapter 5 the author has proposed E-C translation strategies based on Newmark's translation theories. The equivalence of pragmatic functions plays a very important role in this translation. However, as the author mentioned in Chapter 4, vagueness could be also realized in lexical level. In this chapter the author will list some typical vague words in international business communication, and will try to translate them from English into Chinese. This part aims to help people translate those frequently used vague words more efficiently.

Tables used in this chapter indicate some frequently-used vague lexicons in IBE for numbers; comparative degree and superlative degree; verbs; adjectives, adverbs and nouns; approximators of degree, quantity, frequency, time; and other expressions. Column A presents vague expressions in English which I have earlier mentioned. Column B shows the corresponding translations. As words in different contexts have different translations, most of the vague expressions have more than one translation in Chinese in the following tables. Some typical examples are given in Column C to help readers get better understandings. Details are presented in the tables below:

### **6.1 Numbers**

Numerals themselves are precise concepts, but they turn to be vague when they are used in some set phrases and collocations. Table 6.1 shows some vague expressions of numbers. Column A presents vague expressions in numbers in English. Column B shows their translations. A lot of examples were found in books and articles on IBE. Some typical ones will be given in Table 6.1.

A	B		C
Vagueness in English	Vagueness in Chinese		Examples
hundreds of	上百	成 千 上万；	(45) S: The company was responsible for launching Star TV in Asia, racking up <u>thousands of</u> subscribers in the first year. T: 该公司负责在亚洲发送卫星电视，在第一年里的用户数就达 <u>成千上万</u> 。
thousands of	上千		
millions of	数百万		
billions of...	数十亿		
thousands upon thousands...	数千		
hundreds of thousands of		无数；	(46) S: The best domain names are worth <u>thousands upon thousands of</u> dollars and the prices are only going up. T: 最好的域名价值 <u>数千</u> 美元，而且价格还在上涨。
hundreds and hundreds of			
the thousand and one	成千上万；  很多		(47) S: There were 60 million Americans at home working to turn out <u>the thousand and one</u> things required to wage war. T: 美国国内有六千万人在生产 <u>成千上万</u> 种军需品。
a thousand and one...			(48) S: He made <u>a thousand and one</u> explanations of this kind of insurance. T: A.关于这种保险，他做了 <u>很多</u> 解释。 B.关于这种保险他解释地 <u>多极了</u> 。
a thousand	很多；非常；太		(49) S: <u>A thousand</u> thanks for your company's understanding. T: <u>非常</u> 感谢贵公司给予我们的理解。

a hundred...	很多; 多极了	(50) S: We have <u>a hundred</u> things to do before the negotiation. T: 谈判前我们有 <u>很多</u> 事情要做。 谈判前我们要做的事 <u>多极了</u> 。
several dozens of		(51) S: Yes, but you know, we have sold our products to <u>several dozens of</u> countries. T: 是的, 但是您要知道, 我们的产品远销到了 <u>很多</u> 国家。
dozens of		
two and two makes four...	很明显	(52) S: <u>Two and two makes four</u> that all the marine policies we take out automatically include General Average. T: <u>很明显</u> , 我们拿到的海运保险单都自动包括共同海损。(Wang yuzhang, 2003)
six of one and half a dozen	半斤八两	(53) S: Some of employees in this foreign ad-agency are known to be no better than ours....In the old phrase it is <u>six of one and half a dozen</u> of the other... T: 人们都知道那家国外广告中介公司的有些员工并不比我们的好……用句老话来说, 也就是 <u>半斤八两</u> ……

**Table 6.1** Numbers

Firstly, Table 6.1 indicates that the number of the vague expressions in numbers in English is much more than that in Chinese. For example, the Chinese word “成千上万” and “无数” have several corresponding translations in English, such as “thousands upon thousands”, “hundreds and hundreds of”, “a thousand and one” and

so on.

Secondly, seeing from this table, we also find a model for vague expressions of numbers.

#### **Round Number + “-s”+ “of”**

For example, “hundred”, “thousand”, “million”, “billion” are round numbers. Following this model, they are changed into “hundreds of”, “thousands of”, “millions of” and “billions of” which are vagueness mean “many” and “numberless”.

Thirdly, since different nations have different cultural backgrounds, religious beliefs and language expressions, vague usage of numbers as the historical crystallization of the national culture has very distinctive national characteristics. Derived from the Arabic *the Thousand and One Night*, the expression of “a thousand and one” in English implies “many”, while in Chinese “千” and “万” do the same trick. In example (47), if the expression of “the thousand and one” is translated into Chinese literally as “一千零一”, it will have no exaggeration or figurative implication but only contains the precise numeral concept of “1001”.

## **6.2 Comparative Degree and Superlative Degree**

The use of comparative degree and superlative degree of adjectives and adverbs serves to make a described object vague. Table 6.2 shows some vague expressions of comparative degree and superlative degree. Some typical examples will be listed as the following:

A	B	C
Vagueness in English	Vagueness in Chinese	Examples
no more than	不超过	(54) S: If a sentence of imprisonment is imposed, there are limits on the term of imprisonment--- <u>not more than</u> six months or <u>less than</u> three years. T: 如果对他做出徒刑判决, 其刑期也有限制—— <u>不超过</u> 六个月或 <u>少于</u> 三年。
less than	少于	
more than	多于; ...多; ...以上	(55) S: And <u>more than</u> eight firms have placed orders with us ahead of you. T: 而且在你之前有 8 个 <u>以上</u> 的公司与我们下了订单。
more or less	或多或少	(56) S: May shipment we designate to Kyotaru 5000 tons 1.5% <u>more or less</u> . T: 五月份装船厂已谈妥, 由“东京丸”装载 5000 吨, <u>多于或少于</u> 1.5%均可。
by far the best	目前来看最好的	(57) S: It's the quality that counts. Our curtains are <u>by far the best</u> in Europe and probably in the world. T: 我们生产的窗帘 <u>目前来看</u> 是欧洲, 或许是全世界 <u>最好的</u> 。



bigger	更大的; 更多的	(58) S: In respect to the price of hand tools we quoted last week, if you can improve the quantity to <u>a much bigger one</u> , we are glad to give you some discount.  T: 考虑到上周我们手工制品的报价, 如果你能购买 <u>更多</u> 的产品(大量增加购买量), 我们乐意提供一些折扣。
better	更好的; 更优惠的; 更实惠的	(59) S: We are not going to process unless you can make us a <u>better</u> offer.  T: 除非你方出价 <u>更优惠</u> , 不然其他的我们免谈。

Table 6.2 Comparative Degree and Superlative Degree

Table 6.2 shows some comparative degree and superlative degree used frequently. As I have mentioned before, most adjectives and adverbs tend to be essentially vague in nature. The words of “more”, “less”, “most”, “better”, “best” and the phrases of “more or less”, “no more than”, “by far the best”, “more than” and “less than” are vague concepts themselves, for there is no way of telling the exact extent to which an adjective or adverb goes in being thus modified. And as a result of the vague nature of comparative and superlative degree words, relevant messages conveyed inevitable sound and are vague.

6.3 Verbs

Table 6.2 shows some vague expressions of verbs. Some typical examples will be listed as the following:

A	B	C
Vagueness in English	Vagueness in Chinese	Examples
suggest	显示; 暗示	<p>(60) S: The market investigation <u>suggests</u> that there is a steady demand for silk garments of high quality in the American market.</p> <p>T: 市场调查研究<u>显示</u>, 美国市场对高质量的丝绸服装需求稳定。</p>
fear	恐怕	<p>(61) S: Much as we should like to do business with you, we <u>fear</u> we cannot supply with such reasonable quality at the price you ask.</p> <p>T: 虽然本公司非常乐意与贵公司合作, 但我们<u>恐怕</u>不能依照贵公司所要求的价格供应此等好货。</p>
as far as we know	就我方所知; 据我了解	<p>(62) S: <u>As far as we know</u>, they are sound enough, but we have no certain knowledge of their true financial position.</p> <p>T: <u>就我方所知</u>, 该公司名声不错, 但关于他们的财务状况, 我们就不得而知了。</p>
assure	保证; 确定;	<p>(63) S: We can <u>assure</u> you that these suitings are very popular in Eastern market.</p> <p>T: 我公司<u>保证</u>这些服装在东方市场会备受欢迎。</p>

believe	坚信;  相信	(64) S: Considering the improvements it offers, we <u>believe</u> you will find our “Chang Feng” a very good seller in your market. T: 我方 <u>相信</u> 改良后的“长风”牌产品在贵方市场销路会很好。
seem	似乎; 看来; 好像; 可见	(65) S: From their reports it <u>seems</u> clear that there is a good demand for polyester textiles in this area. T: 从他们的报告中明显 <u>可见</u> 该地区对涤纶纺织品的需求量很大。
may/ might	可能; 也许; 大概	(66) S: The bank will look to the creditworthiness of the importer and <u>may</u> require some securities to be lodged with the bank. T: 银行将审查进口商的信誉状况, <u>可能</u> 还需要进口商向银行缴纳一定的抵押金。
according to	根据	(67) S: <u>According to</u> the market report, demand for art and craft goods seems to be returning. T: <u>根据</u> 市场报道, 对工艺品的需求似乎正在恢复。
to think	想; 认为; 或省略“我想”	(68) S: <u>I think</u> it's <u>probable</u> for us to select a similar quality of black tea from other countries at a level about 10% lower than yours. T: A. <u>我想</u> 我们 <u>可能</u> 会选其他国家的红茶, 他们的价钱比你们低

		<p>大约 10%但是质量一样。</p> <p>B. 我们 <u>可能</u>会选其他国家的红茶，他们的价钱比你们低大约 10%但是质量一样。</p>
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Table 6.3 Verbs

Example (68) in Table 6.3 shows that “I think” can be translated into “想”, “认为” or just be elided. As a matter of fact, the vague expressions “I think” appears unnecessary in most cases, since the speaker certainly expresses what is implied in “I think” without special reference to other sources. For example:

(69) S: I wonder if you can send me a copy of your current products catalogue and price list.

T: A 请问您是否可以提供给我一份最新产品的目录表和价目表?

B 我想知道您是否可以提供给我一份最新产品的目录表和价目表?

Obviously in this sentence, the speaker implies his request by using the vague expression “I wonder if” to make readers or hearers feel his politeness and decent mood. In fact, in English culture, the frequent involvement of this vague expression in the request has made it be considered a typical marker for the politeness principle in pragmatic research. If we translate “I wonder if” into Chinese we usually do not use a word for word translation strategy. Chinese usually use translation (A) to express the same meaning.

### 6. 4 Adjectives, Adverbs and Nouns

Table 6.1 shows some vague expressions of adjectives, adverbs and nouns. Column A presents vague expressions in English. Column B shows their translations.

A	B	C
Vagueness in English	Vagueness in Chinese	Examples
enough	不错的; 良好的; 足够的	<p>(70) S: As far as we know, they are sound <u>enough</u>, but we have no certain knowledge of their true financial position.</p> <p>T: 就我方所知, 该公司名声<u>不错</u>, 但关于他们的财务状况, 我们就不得而知了。</p>
further	进一步的	<p>(71) S: According to information received, the prices of light industrial products will go down <u>further</u> in the Southeast Asian market.</p> <p>T: 根据所得到的消息, 东南亚市场的轻工业价格将<u>进一步</u>下跌。</p>
superior	上乘的	<p>(72) S: You should take into consideration our curtains' <u>superior</u> quality.</p> <p>T: 您应该考虑一下我们<u>上乘的</u>质量。</p>
reasonable	好的; 上乘的; 优质的	<p>(73) S: Much as we should like to do business with you, we fear we cannot supply with such <u>reasonable</u> quality at the price you ask.</p> <p>T: 虽然本公司非常乐意与贵公司合作, 但我们恐怕不能依照贵公司所要求的价格供应此等<u>好货</u>。</p>

excellent	优良的; 良好的		<p>(74) S: A yard of the sample has been sent by air mail to assure you that the material is of <u>excellent</u> quality.</p> <p>T: 一码的样品已由空运寄给您, 保证质量<u>优良</u>。</p>
heavy	络绎不绝的	供不应求的	<p>(75) S: We must stress that this offer is firm for three days only because of the <u>heavy</u> demand for the <u>limited</u> supplies of this velvet in stock.</p> <p>T: A 我公司必须强调, 此报价仅在三天内有效。此乃因天鹅绒的存货<u>有限</u>, 需求却<u>不绝</u>。</p> <p>B 此因天鹅绒<u>供不应求</u>。</p>
limited	有限的		
some	稍微, 一些		<p>(76) S: We think it fair to point out that Recent changes in import quotas may cause us difficulty in executing contract orders and that <u>some</u> delay is inevitable.</p> <p>T: 本公司必须指出近来进口限额的改变, 可能使得我们在履行订货合约方面有些困难; 而且<u>稍微</u>迟误也在所难免。</p>
nearly	几乎		<p>(77) S: We have examined all the cartons one by one, and found <u>nearly</u> each of them was leaking more or less.</p> <p>T: 我方逐个检查了所有包装箱, 并发现<u>几乎</u>每件都有或多或少的破损。</p>

satisfactory	满意	<p>(78) S: We herewith send you the goods ordered last week, and hope you will find them <u>satisfactory</u>.</p> <p>T: 上周惠赐订购之货物, 已付运。相信贵公司必感<u>满意</u>。</p>
write	白色的; 乳白色的; 灰白的;	<p>(79) S: Will you please quote for the supply of approximately 100 reams of good quality <u>white</u> poster paper suitable for auction bills and poster work generally?</p> <p>T: 惠请贵公司上报大约 100, 质优的白报纸价格, 此等<u>白</u>报纸适合与一般拍卖广告和海报纸张之用。</p>

**Table 6.4** Adjectival, Adverbial and Nominal Modal Phrase

In this table example (79), “white” is a color word and vagueness as well. This example indicates that people share the same feeling for the core part of colors, whereas their feelings for that of peripheral areas are vague, correspondingly, the words people used are vague. For instance, “黑面包” is called brown bread in English. Brown is the peripheral area of black because people tend to have identical feelings for central area of the color of black. The color of bread maybe between black and brown, therefore users of different languages have chosen different words of color. One more example will be given:

(80) S: It seems that your quotation of brown sugar is acceptable.

T: 看来你红糖报价是可以接受的。

In this sentence, “brown sugar” refers to “红糖” in Chinese, because the color of this kind of sugar is between brown and red.

## 6.5 Approximators of Degree, Quantity, Frequency and Time

Some vague expressions of approximators of degree, quantity, frequency and time will be shown in Table 6.5. These expressions are used frequently in international business communication and our daily life.

A	B	C
Vagueness in English	Vagueness in Chinese	Examples
around	大约	<p>(81) S: Our vessel S.S. "Fengqing" is expected to arrive at Vancouver <u>around</u> the end of November.</p> <p>T: 我方“风情”号货轮<u>大约</u>于11月底抵达温哥华。</p>
about		<p>(82) S: We maybe can deliver the goods partly. That is, in June we deliver <u>about</u> 50% and the rest will be shipped in the following month.</p> <p>T: 我们可以分批交货。六月份交<u>大约</u>50%，剩下的在随后几个月海运给你方。</p>
approximately		<p>(83) S: The inferior quality is due to the deficiency of nitrogen content, which decreases by <u>approximately</u> 10% compared with the last lot.</p> <p>T: 质量次等是由于氮肥含量不足，与上批货相比，含量<u>大约</u>降低了10%。</p>



near	接近的; 基本的		<p>(84) S: For your information, we have received a crowd of inquiries from many other buyers in other districts and expect to close business at something <u>near</u> our level.</p> <p>T: 供你方参考, 我们已经收到了大批来自其他地区许多买主的询盘, 可望<u>基本</u>按我方价格水平成交。</p>
nearly	几乎		<p>(85) S: <u>Nearly</u> all the models you saw at our fashion show are obtainable.</p> <p>T: 在时装展示会上贵方所见的<u>几乎</u>所有样品我公司均可供货。</p>
occasionally	偶尔地	有时	<p>(86) S: We work as supply agents <u>occasionally</u>.</p> <p>T: 我们<u>偶尔</u>也会做代理。</p>
sometimes	不时		<p>(87) S: Disputes <u>sometimes</u> occur during negotiating.</p> <p>T: 谈判时争论<u>不时</u>出现。</p>
in general	大体上; 通常; 总的来说		<p>(88) S: <u>In general</u>, our quotation is in compliance with the present market level.</p> <p>T: <u>总的来说</u>, 我方报价符合当前市场水平。</p>

Table 6.5 Approximators of Degree, Quantity, Frequency and Time

Table 6.5 shows that there exist a number of ways of being vague about quantity, degree, frequency and time in English, that is, something is added to precise number or numbers, or using a vague quantifier such as *approximately, roughly, about, often, occasionally, generally, usually, somewhat, somehow, a lot of*.

## **6.6 Summary**

In this chapter, fifty vague expressions in English and their translations in Chinese have been listed. More than forty examples have been collected from books and articles on IBE written by experienced teachers and businessmen. The author has designed above tables aims to help translate the frequently used vague expressions more efficiently.

## Chapter 7 Conclusion

In the preceding chapters, some aspects concerning vagueness have been studied. This chapter summarizes the major achievements of the study, followed by the implications and limitations of the study.

### 7.1 Major Achievements

Firstly, through analysis of the examples, I have proposed that vague language should have two pragmatic functions: the positive functions and the negative functions. The positive pragmatic functions are contributing accuracy, enhancing the flexibility, deliberately withholding information, mitigating the face-threatening effects and self-protection. People should make full use of the positive functions and avoid the negative functions when adopting vague language in international business.

Secondly, six kinds of realizations of vagueness in international business English with lexicons have been mentioned:

- a. Round Numbers, eg: *thousands upon thousands* (成千上万); *dozens of* (很多)
- b. Comparative Degree and Superlative Degree, eg: *bigger* (更大的,更多的); *better* (更好的, 更优惠的)
- c. Modal Auxiliary Verbs, eg: *might* (可以); *should* (应该)
- d. Modal Lexical Verbs, eg: *seem* (似乎, 好像); *think* (认为)
- e. Adjectival, Adverbial and Nominal Model Phrase, eg: *apparently* (显然地); *possibility* (可能)
- f. Approximators of Degree, Quantity, Frequency and Time, eg: *about* (大约); *approximately* (近似, 大约)

Thirdly, translation strategies of vague language in international business English

have been classified into two types in this thesis. The first is that vague language in the original language is rendered vague in the target one. The second is by using addition, ellipsis, and some other changes. The most important point in this chapter is that the translated information should have the same pragmatic functions as the target one. The author has studied all the above E-C translation strategies of vague language to help other translators improve their translation so as to guarantee businessmen to get a successful business communication and avoid misunderstanding of translated information.

Fourthly, some typical vague words in IBE and their Chinese versions have been listed to help people translate those frequently used vague words more efficiently. I have also found some differences in vague expressions between English and Chinese. For example, Table 6.1 shows that the number of the vague expressions in numbers in English is much more than that in Chinese. A model for vague expressions in numbers in English has been found that is Round Number + “-s”+ “of”.

## **7.2 Implications and Limitations**

The study has its implications in two points. Firstly, the study on vague language in international business English can help people realize and understand how to use vague language as a strategy to meet their business intentions. The pragmatic functions of vague language in international business English can lead people to paying close attention to the use of it in actual international business situations. As we have discussed, the positive functions of vague language can facilitate businesses to a certain extent. Hence, businessmen need to consider using vague language when necessary in business transactions. At the same time, they should be aware that some uses of vague language under some circumstances are boomed to be misleading or even wrong as vague language also has negative functions. Secondly, my proposed E-C translation strategies for vague language can help translators have a successful

translation of vague language. I have listed some typical vague expressions in international business communication, as examples for readers to learn how translate those expressions into Chinese. All in all, this thesis aims to help people translate those frequently-used vague expressions in IBE more efficiently.

The study has its limitations, leaving a bit to be desired. Firstly, this study has been done mainly on English data, and then comes the question: what will the situation be in business communication in Chinese. People may also do some comparative studies on the deliberate use of vague language with business communication in Chinese and English. Secondly, the author mentioned lexical vagueness is common in communication, especially in international business communication. However, the realization of vagueness in international business English can also be studied from syntactic and discourse perspective.

Further researches can be made in the following directions:

- (1) A comparative study of Chinese and English vague language in IBE from cross-culture perspective.
- (2) The realization of vagueness in IBE from syntactic and discourse perspective.

Though imperfect, this research has been a rewarding and valuable experience for me and hopefully the thesis makes an enjoyable and worthwhile reading as well.

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## 相似文献(9条)

### 1. 期刊论文 叶亚丽 浅析国际商务英语中模糊语言的语用功能 -商场现代化2009,“(10)

模糊语言是语言本身具有的特点之一,并广泛应用于人们的言语交际中.国际商务交际则是一种特殊的言语交际,模糊语言也大量存在于其中.并且模糊语言在此具有独特的语用功能.文章在介绍了模糊语言的前提下,通过详细的举例,着重探讨了模糊语言在国际商务英语中的语用功能.

### 2. 期刊论文 乔娇, QIAO Jiao 国际商务英语中的模糊语言语用功能探讨 -河北北方学院学报2008,24(1)

模糊语言是语言本身具有的特点之一,并广泛应用于人们的言语交际中.国际商务交际是一种特殊的言语交际,因此模糊语言大量存在于其中.商务交际作为特殊的言语交际,其中的模糊语言也理所当然地具有独特的语用功能.文章在介绍了模糊语言的前提下,通过详细的举例,着重探讨了模糊语言在国际商务英语中的语用功能.

### 3. 期刊论文 程同春 论模糊语言在国际商务英语中的语用功能 -国际经贸探索2000,16(5)

近年来模糊语言学的研究已取得了一些进展.模糊语言主要包括模糊词语和模糊语句.本文重点论述模糊语言的基本概念,它在国际商务英语中的语用功能及其应用.

### 4. 期刊论文 王春晖 模糊语言在国际商务英语中的应用 -湖北广播电视大学学报2010,30(7)

商务英语要求语言表达严谨准确,但是恰当地使用模糊语言,不仅不会影响商务英语表达的准确性,反而可以使语言表达更灵活生动、准确委婉、严谨得体.本文介绍了模糊语言的概念和语用功能,并对模糊语言在商务信函、商务谈判、商务合同和商务广告中的运用进行了分析和探讨.

### 5. 学位论文 董顺琪 国际商务英语话语研究以及对国际商务英语翻译的启示 2005

二战后专门用途英语开始发展起来,形成了在科技,教育,商业等领域的分支.尤其是在商业领域的发展尤其引起了关注.随着商务活动和对外交流的日益频繁,商务活动的领域日益扩展到国际领域,其形式和内容也由原来单一的进出口货物贸易发展到了许多相关领域,如技术引进,国际金融,国际商法,涉外保险,招商引资,海外投资,广告,国际运输等.国际商务英语就是在这样的背景下产生的.国际商务英语是以国际商务为语言背景的一种应用性英语语体,它涵盖了相关的各个领域的专业英语,如经贸英语、金融英语、经济学英语、保险英语、法律英语、广告英语和航运英语等.随着近年来对国际商务英语研究的发展,国际商务英语已经逐渐发展成为一门较为独立的学科,成为具备较强社会功能的语言变体和语言学与应用语言学的一个不可忽视的分支。

从上个世纪70年代开始,借助于语言学与应用语言学的理论,人们对国际商务英语进行了多视角的研究,取得了丰硕的成果.本文试图把国际商务英语的研究放在话语分析这一背景下进行,以期取得对国际商务英语更加完整和深刻的认识,获得基于此研究基础的对国际商务英语翻译的一些启示.话语分析致力于调查话语在实际情景中的运用,调查专业世界的真实情况,对话语和话语产生的社会、文化之间的互动进行阐述.本文借鉴了斯考伦(Scollon)所提出的话语系统理论框架和巴蒂亚(Bhatia)话语分析的社会批评视角作为理论基础,提出国际商务活动是人类在特定领域内的一种交流,在这一领域内的任何的交流形式都可以看成是一个话语系统,包括意识形态,社会化,话语形式和礼貌体制四个方面的内容.而专业话语分析在经历了文本视角和策略视角之后,逐渐转向了社会批评视角,即调查专业技术的实际情况.专业技术包括学科知识,专业惯例和做法,话语能力这三个方面.笔者依据斯考伦的话语系统理论,首先论述了国际商务英语的话语系统,从话语系统的角度分析国际商务英语并分别对这一体系中的四个方面进行了分析.随后从专业话语分析的社会批评视角来分析国际商务英语体系,分别是学科知识,专业惯例和做法以及话语产出和接受能力.并对中英国际商务话语的差异进行了分析.从话语的角度对商务英语的内涵和特点进行了研究,指出:国际商务英语是在国际商务场合中,商务活动参与的人为达到各自的商业目的,遵守行业惯例和程序并接受社会文化因素的影响,有选择地使用英语的词汇和语法资源,运用适当的语用策略,以书面或口头的形式进行交际活动的英语系统.最后,根据国际商务英语的特点以及中英文在国际商务话语的差异,提出了对翻译的一些启示,并以翻译动态等值理论为基础探讨了国际商务英语的翻译方法.国际商务英语的翻译就是要在相同的话语语境下在不同的语言中构建话语系统的过程,是一种话语的功能对等.这种功能对等分别体现在概念意义,人际意义和语篇意义三个方面的功能对等上.笔者认为只有达到这三个方面的对等才能比较完全地在两种语言之间构建有效的国际商务话语系统.

本文分为以下五章:

第一章:介绍了什么是国际商务英语和话语分析.先从ESP的发展引申出国际商务英语的出现和发展,指出国际商务英语是专门用途英语的分支,是在国际商务环境和跨文化交际下使用的英语.随后讨论了对国际商务英语学科的定位问题.最后引出本文要研究的主要问题,建立国际商务英语话语系统,并从话语分析的角度对这一系统进行分析以及得出对翻译的一些启示.

第二章:本章旨在建立国际商务英语话语系统.首先介绍了斯考伦的话语系统的四个方面,然后运用这四个方面分析了国际商务英语是怎样的话语系统.在意识形态上,国际商务英语是以达成特定的商业目的为其意识形态的,完成国际商务业务的任何方式和惯例都是在这意识的约束下构成和进行的,这也是区分国际商业领域和其他领域的标志.在社会化上,任何一个要进入国际商业领域的人都需要经过学习和特定的“社会化过程”以显示其作为国际商务英语话语系统成员的身份.“社会化过程”指的是学习特殊的学科和专业知识,掌握符合本国文化习惯的专业惯例和做法.在话语体制上,主要介绍了国际商务英语话语系统的非修辞性,专业语类以及语言功能三个方面的特点.在面子系统上,介绍了有关面子在国际商务英语话语中的作用以及运用语用学的“合作原则”,“礼貌原则”和“模糊语言”来避免威胁面子的行为以达到维持良好的商务关系的目的.

第三章:从话语分析的角度对国际商务话语系统进行分析,分别从专业话语的社会批评视角的三个方面来进行.文章先介绍了这三个方面的含义以及三者在话语体系重视如何共同或是单独起作用的.并区分了国际商务英语话语和中文话语在国际商务中的差异.随后用国际商务英语话语系统的两种形式:信函(书面话语)和谈判(口语话语)为例作了说明.总结国际商务英语话语的特点和内涵,给出从话语系统和分析角度对国际商务英语的定义.

第四章:国际商务话语研究对翻译的启示.首先对国际商务英语话语的特点进行了总结,指出国际商务英语的三方面特点:词汇专业性强,准确性高,话语体制多受专业惯例和文化的影响,话语互动多采用礼貌,模糊等语用策略.而这三方面的特点对应语域理论中语言的三大功能:概念功能,人际功能和语篇功能.话语翻译就是要在不同的语言和文化间达到一种动态的对等,分别体现概念功能,人际功能和语篇功能的对等上.笔者认为只有达到这三个方面的对等才能比较完全地在两种语言之间构建有效的国际商务话语系统.

第五章:对全文的总结.指出话语分析的研究促进了国际商务英语研究的发展,从静态的语言描写转向了动态的对国际商务话语的描写,希望从这一角度对国际商务英语的分析能够更深入完整的认识国际商务英语这一学科分支.笔者相信,这样做,无论是对国际商务英语的翻译研究还是教学研究都有一定的帮助.

### 6. 期刊论文 张芬, 王力, ZHANG Fen, WANG Li 模糊语言在英语广告和商务英语中的应用 -绵阳师范学院学报

2007,26(3)

模糊语言在英语使用中占相当大的比重,在广告文化中模糊语言被大量使用以达到促进商品销售和迅速传递商业信息的功能,在国际商务英语中模糊语言也因其独特的作用被广泛使用.

### 7. 期刊论文 黄菲 模糊语言在国际商务谈判中的应用 -科技信息2010,“(15)

国际商务谈判属于口语交流,其中最重要的环节就在于“谈”,而谈离不开语言,有了语言,则存在看语言的理解和语用问题.模糊语的使用作为一种策略手段和语言技巧适用于国际商务谈判,并发挥着意想不到的积极作用.本文通过对模糊语言基本概念的介绍和一些实例的分析,探讨了模糊语言在国际商务英语谈判中的运用极其积极作用.

### 8. 期刊论文 张维维, 张立新 商务英语谈判中的模糊语用策略 -文教资料2006,“(33)

模糊语的使用作为一种策略手段和语言技巧适用于国际商务英语谈判,并发挥着意想不到的积极作用.本文通过对模糊语言基本概念的介绍和一些实例的

分析, 讲述了在国际商务英语谈判中模糊语的运用.

## 9. 学位论文 高婷婷 商务谈判英语中模糊的语用阐释及其效用研究 2007

中国的改革开放已经进行了二十多年, 随之而来的是经济的繁荣和国际商务活动的频繁. 商务英语是人们从事国际商务活动的重要语言工具. 中国成功地加入世界贸易组织后, 更进一步融入全球化的迅猛浪潮中, 国际商业竞争愈演愈烈, 在此种背景下国际商务英语的重要性与日俱增. 在国际商务英语的使用中, 话语交流又占有绝对重要的地位. 如何正确、有效的使用商务英语进行商务沟通越来越受到英语学习者及研究者的关注.

自从LA. zadeh提出“模糊集”这一理论后, 模糊概念被广泛延伸到各个领域, 模糊语言学这门新兴学科就是其一. 众所周知, 人类语言在诸多层面上都存在许多与模糊性相关的问题, 模糊性是语言的本质属性. 作为反映客观世界, 表达人类思维结果的语言的重要组成部分和普遍现象, 模糊语言广泛地出现和使用在不同的方面和领域. 商务英语的特殊性在于目的性极强, 其交际效果的好坏直接关系到经济效益. 而模糊语言对于商务英语的交际效果有着举足轻重的作用. 合理地使用模糊语言也是商务英语使用者交际能力的一个重要衡量标准. 国内外研究人员对语言的模糊性已经进行了较为深入的研究, 如语义, 产生动机, 语篇分析等, 然而, 对于模糊在商务英语会话中的语用意义及其积极语用功能还很少有深入系统的研究. 因此本文在前人研究的基础上, 运用合作原则和礼貌原则面子理论, 这两个语用原则从语用学的角度集中探讨了模糊在商务对话中的应用及功能.

在第一章中, 提出了当前研究的起源和对模糊语言研究的必要性和意义. 文章的目的是为了引起商务英语语言使用者对于模糊在交流中的重视, 促使其以更好的语言知识和技能充实自身, 以达到更好的交际目的. 在研究中, 笔者选用真实的商务谈判对话对模糊进行定性分析.

在第二章文献综述部分, 首先给出了前人关于模糊的定义, 对几个关于模糊的易混淆的近似概念进行了辨析. 接着回顾了国内国外对于模糊语言研究的成果, 对商务英语的特性及商务英语中模糊的表现和作用做了简要的分析, 并表明了本次研究中所采用的定义, 划分和观点.

在第三章, 对商务英语中的模糊进行了语用阐释, 运用相关理论有: 合作原则, 礼貌原则和面子理论. 本章可分为两部分, 第一部分将谈判中运用模糊的大量实例按照合作原则的四条准则分类归纳, 并分别进行了细致透彻的分析. 第二部分对模糊的分析是从礼貌原则入手, 并将模糊定性为礼貌策略用于维护面子. 研究的主要精力, 放在探究模糊, 作为维护听话人的消极面子和积极面子的策略上. 尝试以科学的态度全面的剖析模糊语言在商务交流中的意义, 使模糊这一现象得到系统的理论阐释, 在以后的应用中, 可以有更多的理论支撑和指导.

第四章, 通过对大量实例的分析, 归纳总结出模糊在商务谈判英语中的五种积极效用: 提高效率, 增强弹性, 提高合适性, 增强说服力以及创造和谐交流环境. 另外, 研究还涉及到过度或非恰当的使用模糊在商务英语中的消极作用, 以提醒使用者注意适度正确的运用模糊.

在最后结论中, 对全文主要概念和研究内容以及研究意义做出总结, 并提出了当前研究的局限性. 对于商务英语学习者, 教学者和使用者提出了建议, 也希望本文可为后来者研究商务英语对话做些推动工作.

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