

Practical Change and Theoretical Advancement of Legal Translation in the Digital Age

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ABSTRACT

With the rapid development of digital technology, the demand for efficient and precise legal language services in international legal communication is increasing. Digital and intelligent technologies are reshaping the working mode of traditional legal translation, showing significant advantages in improving translation efficiency, guaranteeing professional standardization, and reducing costs. This article focuses on the core changes of legal language services under the perspective of technology empowerment, and systematically combs through the application scenarios and effectiveness of digital tools (e.g., machine translation, AI assistance, legal corpus, etc.) in the actual translation process, as well as their innovative roles in accurate translation, translation quality self-checking, and collaboration process. On this basis, the article further explores the renewal of the theoretical paradigm of legal translation driven by technology, proposing a new path of interdisciplinary integration and process reengineering. This aims to provide theoretical support and practical reference for the creation of an efficient, reliable, and intelligent legal language service system.

KEYWORDS

Digital era; Legal translation; Practice change; Theory advancement

1 The current situation of legal language services in the digital era

Legal language services encompass all types of translation, interpretation, communication, and other specialized technical support work related to the legal process, whose primary objective is to ensure the accurate and equivalent transmission of legal information between different languages. Whether it is legal documents, judicial procedures, or international business negotiations, high-precision cross-language expression is crucial.

1.1 Definition and development history of legal language service

A legal language service primarily provides specialized technical support for cross-language conversion, interpretation, and communication of legal acts, ensuring that legal information in different languages has equivalent legal significance in law ^[1]. Whether it is the interpretation of legal documents, communication in judicial proceedings, or cooperation agreements reached in international business, high-precision cross-language translation is required to ensure the clear expression of legal intent. Legal language services can be divided into three phases. Before the 1980s, translation was done manually, with translators relying on their legal knowledge, linguistic skills, and specialized vocabulary accumulated over time to find and translate texts with the aid of traditional paper resources, such as dictionaries and books. From the 1980s to the early 21st century, along with the wide application of computers and related software, China's legal translation has stepped into the period of instrumentalization, word processing software, early electronic dictionaries, simple vocabulary databases and so on have been put into use, which has improved the efficiency of typing and the convenience of document management. After entering the 21st century, with the popularization of the Internet and the emergence of various technological means, legal language services have entered an era of deep integration, where vocabulary resources can be shared by many people and updated promptly; work platforms support remote cooperation among interpreters, reviewers and clients to achieve smooth progress of projects; and cloud computing can store and centrally retrieve laws and regulations in multiple languages. The cloud stores and centrally retrieves multilingual laws and regulations.

1.2 The impact of digital technology on legal translation

With the development of digitalisation, the way legal translation works, the way quality is controlled, and the form of the whole service have changed dramatically. Technology has increased the efficiency of processing large volumes of documents. The system, which is trained on specialised legal materials, is capable of quickly completing primary translations of various types of legal documents, thereby saving a significant amount of time for professional interpreters. Tools are already available that automatically recognize legally specific terms, formatted legal expressions, and definitions of important provisions in documents. At the same time, intelligent technologies enable high-quality translation of similar documents that have been previously processed. During the translation process, when similar or identical sentences or

clauses appear, the system can automatically provide recommended translations for the translator's reference or direct reuse, thereby reducing the repetitiveness of the translation work and improving translation quality. And the automatic quality inspection software can automatically scan the translation according to the rules to find out the spelling mistakes of numbers, dates, names of people and places, etc., as well as conduct a comprehensive and accurate check of important clauses (e.g., liability clauses, indemnification clauses, etc.) in order to avoid the basic mistakes that lead to serious legal consequences^[2].

2 Innovation of legal translation practice enabled by technology

Under the impetus of digital transformation, the practice scenarios of legal translation work are becoming increasingly diverse, and the new tasks and demands faced are also more complex and varied. The traditional translation mode struggles to cope with the vast amount of legal text data, high-intensity working hours, and ever-increasing quality standards. In response to these challenges, the legal translation field has been exploring innovative practices with technology as the core driving force. It has gradually formed a variety of representative modernized service models. The following section will systematically explain how digital technology brings profound changes to legal translation practice from the perspectives of machine translation and artificial intelligence, corpus and big data, and intelligent tools.

2.1 Application of machine translation and artificial intelligence in legal translation

Introducing machine translation technology and artificial intelligence into legal translation enhances the processing efficiency of legal texts, without aiming to replace experts, but rather serving as a powerful assistant to enable individuals to focus more on their work. This can be seen on two levels: for ordinary legal texts that require rapid processing, such as larger form contract texts or basic legal provisions, machine translation systems can quickly produce initial translations. This gives professional translators an entry point for in-depth proofreading, revision, and refinement directly, eliminating the time investment of typing translations from scratch and reducing the entire cycle for the same batch of work. Advanced artificial intelligence technology has been able to help people better understand the structure of legal texts and the relationships between them. For example, the system can identify the core legal provisions in a document (e.g., specific types of provisions, key terms) and their logical relationships (e.g., a right is based on a specific obligation). Such an understanding can help the translator to point out the key points and difficulties in the document and help the translator to focus more attention on what is important in order to achieve an accurate translation^[3].

2.2 The role of corpus and big data in enhancing the accuracy of legal translation

In legal translation, the biggest challenge is to ensure the consistency and standardization of vocabulary. The construction of large, professionally reviewed bilingual (or multilingual) databases of law (which can be referred to as "legal corpora") and the analysis of the rules contained therein through data processing can provide a reliable reference for improving the accuracy of translations and reducing the arbitrariness of translations. This kind of corpus is a large number of real legal texts collected from formal legal practice, as well as excellent translations (such as legal provisions, effective judgments, standardized contracts, etc.) that have been proven in practice. It provides a direct basis for querying specific legal terms in specific legal contexts and authoritative translations. In the process of translation, if the translation process encounters some difficult to understand legal terms (such as the Anglo-American law "Consideration"), by consulting the relevant corpus, it can be clearly seen that the concept in a variety of typical legal instruments (such as sales contracts, agency agreements, etc.) in a widely recognized form of translation (usually) (usually translated as "remuneration" and "consideration"), and clarify its use in specific contexts, increasing the certainty of the translation method and making the translation more persuasive^[4].

2.3 Intelligent translation tools' improvement of legal translation quality

The main role of modern intelligent translation tools is to systematically integrate functions, constantly monitor the translation process, and actively prevent all kinds of translation errors, enforcing consistency and standardization of all important factors in translation. During the translation or proofreading process, the tool systematically scans the translated text according to predefined rules. It quickly warns or indicates possible problems, including general basic errors (e.g. incorrect conversion of numbers, dates, important names or proper nouns in the translated text), fundamental linguistic errors (e.g. obvious grammatical or spelling mistakes) and compliance with the formal requirements of certain important legal texts, such as legal clauses. Formal regulations, such as the hierarchical coding of legal provisions ("Article X" and "Paragraph Y"). At the same time, the vocabulary database also stipulates that the translator must use the

approved unique standard translation of a specific legal term throughout the entire document or topic; the translation memory function refers to the fact that when encountering the content very similar to the previously processed statements or fragments when translating, it will automatically allude to or apply the historically excellent translations in order to ensure the consistency of the expression and to comply with the normative examples of the provisions.

3 Innovation and development of legal translation theory in the digital era

The preceding article has systematically sorted out the multidimensional innovations of legal translation practice driven by digital technology, and these technological means and new working modes have greatly expanded the boundaries and efficiency of legal language services. However, the rapid progress in practice also puts forward new requirements for legal translation theory. Existing traditional theories have revealed the limitations of insufficient adaptability and limited explanatory power in the face of increasingly complex technical scenarios and collaborative processes. In order to respond to the challenges of practical development in the digital era, there is an urgent need to update and expand legal translation theories and to continuously improve their significance in guiding practical work and industry change. To this end, the next section will focus on analyzing the shortcomings of the traditional theoretical perspective and discussing the specific path of theoretical innovation.

3.1 Traditional perspectives and limitations of legal translation theory

The previous understanding of legal translation mainly focuses on how to ensure that the legal function is not changed after translation. This is mainly because the translation work is done independently by people with rich knowledge of language and law, and the ideal translation should have the same effect as the original text in the new legal context. This understanding of "equivalence of effect" puts the emphasis on accurate translation of vocabulary, high-level sentence structure, and reproduction of special legal styles. This emphasizes the important task of legal translation in maintaining the legal effect, and this way of thinking tends to regard translation as a process of textual manipulation detached from the context of legal practice, with insufficient consideration given to the specific steps of the work, the influence of the interaction of the different subjects (lawyers, parties, etc.) on their choices, and the legal acts to which the translation is ultimately applied. For example, when translating an internal system into another language, it is important not only to choose the exact terminology but also to consider whether the system will be easily understood and implemented by employees in the new environment and whether it can be effectively interpreted if a dispute arises later^[5].

3.2 An innovative framework for translation theory in the digital age

In the face of changing realities and the spread of technology, the perception of legal translation has become increasingly practical. The new understanding still focuses on keeping the document in its original legal function, but pays more attention to the ways and procedures to achieve this purpose. The focus is no longer limited to translating the text, but is seen as a link in the modern dissemination of the law; redefining how professional translators can most effectively use the tools to achieve their goals; and how the entire translation process can be rationalized to ensure efficiency and quality. Specifically, more support is now being given to the overall framework of translation activities, including how automatic translation tools can assist in basic text conversion; how specialized terminology libraries can provide reliable references; how collaboration platforms can coordinate multi-party participation; how automatic proofreading functions can reduce underlying errors; and how project scheduling can ensure that tasks are completed on time. At the same time, with the help of tools that can quickly provide suggestions for first drafts, alternative word schemes or sentence adjustments, the translators' expertise lies in weighing the various possible options proposed by the tools according to their understanding of the legal rules in the new environment, the specific purposes of using the documents and the risks that may be hidden, and finally selecting the expression that best guarantees the intent of the original text.

3.3 Interdisciplinary theories and methods in legal translation studies

A comprehensive understanding of today's complex legal translations can only be achieved by the integrated use of multidisciplinary knowledge and methods. This comprehensive application is mainly manifested in the following three aspects:

The cornerstone role of legal knowledge: understanding the systematic relationship between legal rules and domain-specific provisions helps to understand the nature of legal concepts, so as to recognize the main differences between the

legal systems of the common law and the civil law system, to understand the way of expression of the legal provisions, and to judge the effectiveness of the legal provisions. For example, the "deposit" stipulated in the contract in different legal environments will have subtle differences in the conditions of refund; the key to translation is to use the closest expression of the legal consequences of the target rules.

Auxiliary role of information processing tools: analysis of linguistic and data principles and methods, provision of the basis for processing and retrieval of a large amount of legal literature data, support for the creation of specialized vocabularies, development and application of automated tools.

Management of Teamwork and Procedural Arrangement: exploring how to organize and coordinate the idea of multi-person collaboration, designing the steps of translation tasks, reasonably allocating personnel, establishing an effective communication mechanism, and controlling the quality in view of the handling of transnational legal affairs, such as international arbitration and cooperation among multiple law firms. It will provide new ideas for improving overall work efficiency and enhancing the efficiency of resource utilization.

4 Conclusion

Against the background of the rapid development of digital technology, legal translation has transitioned from the traditional labor-intensive to a new model combining technology-intensive and professional synergy. Achieving the equivalence and stability of legal texts in a multilingual and multi-jurisdictional environment relies on continuous innovation in the fields of law, language technology, and process organization. On the one hand, it is necessary to continuously improve digital tools such as AI assistance, intelligent corpus, online collaboration platform, etc., to realize the optimal balance of translation quality, efficiency and resource utilization; on the other hand, it is also necessary to continuously promote theoretical innovation, and to deeply combine multi-subject synergy, technological integration and industry standards, in order to provide a solid theoretical basis and practical practical path for the sustainable development of global legal services.

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