

## On Pun in Corporate Mission Statements of China's Enterprises: Categories and C-E Translation

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### Abstract

Pun, a typical figure of speech, usually has a surface meaning and an underlying meaning. Pun is frequently employed in Chinese corporate mission statements (CMS), but there exists a lack of corresponding discussion and research. This paper firstly analyses CMS of China's Top 500 enterprises as examples, then roughly classifies pun in CMS into three categories, namely, homophonic pun, semantic pun and grammatical pun. In order to perform the informative and vocative function of CMS, two corresponding translation strategies are proposed with the guidance of Peter Newmark's text typology and communicative translation, that is, fit translation and paraphrasing pun in two terms. This paper contributes to enriching the research content and research perspective of China's corporate mission statements and pun.

**Key Words:** Categories, C-E translation, China's Top 500 enterprises, CMS, Pun

### Introduction

Corporate mission statement (CMS) describes an enterprise's core philosophy and long-term goal in simple words, providing guidance for decision makers, setting up behavioral standards for employees, and serving as a platform for customers to understand a company. The concept of CMS was firstly proposed by Drucker (1973) who thought a company is highlighted by its mission instead of the name or articles of incorporation. In terms of wording, Chinese mission statements tend to employ figures of speech such as pun (Shuangguan). At present, the research direction of pun is mainly focused on the definition, category, English-Chinese comparison and translation while the research content centers on advertisements, film and television subtitles, ancient poetry and some specific works. However, in business discourse, pun is also used in Chinese CMS in addition to advertisements, which could be mainly divided into homophonic puns, semantic puns and grammatical puns. Due to its distinctive feature, it is challenging to translate puns pertinently. At present, the quality of C-E translation of pun in some corporate mission statements is far from satisfactory, and meanwhile the closely-related research in fact is not enough, therefore it is in urgent need of comprehensive and in-depth discussion in this field.

### Literature Review

Obviously, there is not a universal definition of pun. According to *Oxford Dictionary*, pun refers to "the clever or humorous use of a word that has more than one meaning, or of words that have different meanings but sound the same". For example, in a sentence "Jane lost the game and her temper", "lost" is a pun with two meanings (being defeated in a game and being angry). Chinese scholar Chen Wangdao (1979) defined pun as a figure of speech in which one word or phrase refers

to two different things simultaneously. Wang Xijie (2001) later put forward “pun means that the writer or speaker consciously uses words with two or more meanings for a particular purpose”. Accordingly, scholars also proposed different classifications of pun on the basis of diverse standards. By comparing Chinese and English, it can be found that there exist abundant same categories and some personalized puns, such as Xi Zi Shuang Guan in Chinese and morpheme pun in English.

It is well acknowledged that there are abundant researches on pun, but whether there are enough research related to C-E translation of pun in corporate mission statements is a question. To dig out the research status systematically, this paper employs CiteSpace, a widely used tool for visual exploration of scientific literature. This paper analyzed the literature related to C-E translation of pun in corporate mission statements published on CNKI and WOS between 2001 and 2021, respectively involving previous studies on pun and corporate mission statements, which aims to assist more researchers comprehensively understanding the importance of the C-E translation of CMS, practical translation and publicity, thus promoting the “going global” of Chinese enterprises in the new era.

The foreign language research data for this article is sourced from the Web of Science (WOS) Core Collection, with the subjects set as “corporate mission statement” and “pun”, the document type limited to “Article”, and the language restricted to “English”. The time span is from 2011 to 2021, and the search was conducted in the Social Sciences Citation Index (SSCI). Accordingly, The Chinese research data for this article is sourced from the China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI) journal articles. The subject is set as “企业使命宣言” and “双关”, with the document type limited to journal articles. The time span is from 2011 to 2021, and the search was conducted in the CSSCI journals.

Based on the literature research and analysis through such two well-known databases as WOS and CNKI, it can be concluded that much previous research mainly centers around the study of mission statement from the perspective of management (Kemp & Dwyer, 2003; William et al., 2014), business and economics (Penco et al., 2017; Mion et al., 2023), education (Taylor & Morphew 2010; Wilkerson & Eugene 2018) and medicine (Matthews et al., 2023). A large proportion of the research has focused on strategy implementation (Rey & Bastons, 2018; Jeon & Cho 2021), formulation (Bikai-Nyunai, 2002; Penco et al., 2017) and performance (Bart, 2001; Zhang et al., 2015). To date, little work has investigated CMS in relation to pun translation from the perspective of linguistics. In the present study, we thus investigated pun in CMS of China’s top 500 enterprises, classified the typical types of pun and put forward corresponding C-E translation strategies, which helps to enrich the research content and perspective in this field.

### **Methodology**

CMS is an essential part of companies’ publicity materials, usually exists in the companies’ official websites or printed in brochures. Because of the accessibility of the source and the feasibility of the process, all the data in this paper are collected from the former source. The present research adopted a systematic review process which relies on the scope to great extent. In order to ensure the rich corpus and high authenticity, a systematic search was implemented in the list of Fortune China Top 500 from 2011 to 2021. After browsing all the target companies, there are 1025 companies listed at least for one time. Some companies without CMS had to be excluded. To ensure the data correctness, these data were reviewed again and checked in an Excel spreadsheet.

In analysis, this research firstly identified whether there is a pun in each piece of CMS and then categorized them according to their feature; secondly, combined with the pun translation strate-

gies and characteristics of CMS, two corresponding C-E translation strategies of pun in CMS were proposed with the guidance of Peter Newmark's (2001) text typology and communicative translation.

### Results and Discussion

Guided by the corresponding theories of pun as well as Peter Newmark's (2001) text typology and communicative translation, and leveraging rigorous data collection and analysis, this section is primarily dedicated to the classification of pun in Chinese corporate mission statements. Additionally, it delves into the translation methods of pun in these corporate mission statements from Chinese to English.

#### *Pun in Chinese CMS*

Puns in Chinese corporate mission statements are widely used with relatively diverse categories. After browsing all the companies' official websites on the list of Fortune Chinese 500 from 2011 to 2021, pun in CMS mainly can be classified into homophonic pun, semantic pun and grammatical pun, which is basically in accordance with the classification adopted by Seewoester (2011) who thinks it is the intertwining of co-text, linguistic form, and meaning that enables the phenomenon of punning which can be fell into phonological, lexical and syntactic categorizations.

##### *1) Homophonic Pun*

Homophonic pun refers to identical or similar sounds but different words with different meanings. For example, in a famous ancient Chinese poem, “东边日出西边雨，道是无晴还有晴” (The west is veiled in rain, the east enjoys sunshine; My dear one is as deep in love as day is fine.), the Chinese character “晴” (sunny) shares the same sound of “情” (affection), implicitly and appropriately conveying the delicate feeling of a girl who falls in first love.

E.g. 1: 厦门象屿集团有限公司 (XMXYG Corporation)

ST<sup>1</sup>: 计利天下 相与有成

“相与有成”, a four-character phrase, means mutual interaction and assistance to gain achievements. The Chinese phrase “相与” is a pun, with the surface meaning “together with all business partners and other stakeholders”. Besides, it can be found the homonym of “相与” in Chinese is “象屿”, the name of the company, highlighting that the company hopes to make progress and achievements.

E.g. 2: 桐昆控股集团有限公司 (Tongkun Group)

ST: 行纤维之事 利国计民生

Tongkun Group is a large-scale integrated company involving diversified fields, such as different types of textiles and related fibers. In its mission, the Chinese phrase “纤维” is a pun, firstly meaning “fiber” which the company have to do with. Besides, the sound of “纤维” is similar to the sound of the phrase “些微” (*slight* in English), reflecting the company expresses their mission to benefit the country and people in a modest way, in accordance to we Chinese' euphemistic and implicit character.

##### *2) Semantic Pun*

Semantic pun is a figure of speech to express double or multiple meanings by adopting polysemy. Polysemy is widely common in Chinese, helping people to have rich associations and obtain

<sup>1</sup> Note: ST stands for the source text and OTT in the following stands for the original target text (same as below).

different semantic understanding when read a word or sentence. It can be found that semantic pun not only prevails in Chinese poetry, and advertising, but also in corporate mission statements. The typical cases are shown as follows:

E.g. 3: 国家电网有限公司 (State Grid Corporation of China)

ST: 为美好生活充电 为美丽中国赋能

The Chinese verb phrase “充电”, a typical semantic pun, conveying two meanings. For one thing, it means “to be filled with electrical power”, closely related to the business of the enterprise—investment, construction and operation of power grids. For another, it has been well accepted as an internet buzzword in China, collocating with different words to express abundant meanings. For instance, “头脑(brain)充电” means acquiring new knowledge to be more intelligent and wise or “身体 (body) 充电” equals to enough rest and food to refresh body. Therefore, when “美好生活 (bright life)” is matched with “充电”, it means State Grid succinctly acquire different kinds of resources to enhance themselves and pursue a beautiful life in future.

E.g. 4: 新希望集团有限公司 (New Hope Group)

ST: 希望, 让生活更美好

New Hope Group Co., Ltd. is a private enterprise group mainly engaged in modern agriculture and food industry, focusing on people’s livelihood. In this piece of mission statement, the pun “希望” firstly represents a life philosophy that expectation and hope can make a better life. Secondly, it reflects the group has been committed to hard work to bring a beautiful future for all employees, shareholders, partners, customers as well as the whole society. The above two meanings are also clearly interpreted on the company’s website. Similar expression also appears in the CMS of Wanhua Chemical Group Co., Ltd. In “化学, 让生活更美好”, “化学” refers to “chemistry, a kind of scientific study” and “the company itself”.

### 3) Grammatical Pun

Different from homophonic pun and semantic pun, grammatical pun focuses on the grammatical function of a word or phrase to convey both surface and deep information. In Chinese, words with two or more parts of speech is common, so they are typically adopted in advertisement and antithetical couplet to increase the sense of humor and attraction with concise words. Similarly, CMS also tends to employ grammatical pun for the same purpose.

E.g. 5: 石药控股集团有限公司 (CSPC Pharmaceutical Group)

ST: 做好药, 为中国, 善报天下人

This mission statement is launched by CSPC, a national innovation-oriented enterprise in the field of pharmacy. It increases the connotation by altering the part of speech to reach the purpose of pun. “做好药” in Chinese can be interpreted as “做+好药” and “做好+药”, so “好” respectively functions as an adjective to modify “药” and an adverbial to reflect the degree of “做”. The former lays emphasis on the quality and curative effect of medicine while the latter highlights the state and degree of how to produce and develop medicine. These two aspects correctly match with the interpretation of the mission statement on the company’s official website.

E.g. 6: 美的集团股份有限公司 (Media Group)

ST: 联动人与万物, 启迪美的世界

Midea Group specializes in household appliances, dedicating itself to bringing convenience and pleasantness to customers. This piece of mission statement concisely but successfully presents a

beautiful picture for people to think and expect by employing a grammatical pun. “美的” firstly is a noun, referring to the brand name “Media” and secondly an adjective phrase, meaning “beautiful”, which means that Media upholds the principle of creating beauty and value for the world.

### *C-E Translation of Pun in CMS*

CMS is a kind of practical discourse with specific purposes, integrating social studies, aesthetics, psychology, literature and linguistics. C-E translation of CMS belongs to the sub-category of applied translation studies, but there is not much study on the theory and practice of C-E translation of corporate mission statements, not to mention C-E translation of pun in CMS. However, the current state of the translation is subpar, fraught with numerous issues, necessitating suggestions for improvement. While pun in Chinese and English share some similarities, their differences are significant. Coupled with the uniqueness of CMS, the challenge of translation of pun becomes even more pronounced. Traditionally, aiming at the translation of pun in diverse fields, the main theories involve functional equivalence theory, Skopos theory, relevance theory and Delabastita's approach of pun translation strategies (1993). However, this paper attempts to adopt Peter Newmark's (2001) text typology and communicative translation.

To identify the strategies applicable to C-E translation of puns in CMS, it is essential to analyze the purpose, characteristic and linguistic style of CMS in the first place. Peter Newmark's (2001) text typology (expressive function, informative function, vocative function) helps to identify sentence patterns and genres. CMS can be regarded as an “informative text with vocative function” according to his classification, because it intends to declare the value, standards, target market and other information to employees, shareholders and customers. Accordingly, his (2001) communicative translation tends to produce an effect on its targeted foreign readers as same as the native readers, laying emphasis on the receptor's understanding and response. Based on the analysis of the collected data and the guidance of Newmark's text typology and communicative, this paper tries to put forward two strategies to translate pun in Chinese CMS into English, that is, fit translation and phrasing pun to two terms.

#### *1) Fit Translation*

As we know, some scholars insist that there exist obstacles about the translatability of pun, including Newmark (2001) who also mentioned its difficulty. In fact, some types of pun could be translated with the guidance of translation theories, sometimes bilingual coincidence even happen, which reflects the interoperability and integration of Chinese and English. Based on such coincidence, fit translation could take account in both the content and form of CMS, not common but brilliant indeed. Fit translation refers to finding a pun in target language equivalent with that in the original text. This translation strategy fully performs its informative and vocative function of CMS, managing to produce the same effect on the target readers as the original does on the native readers. The typical examples are as follows:

E.g. 7: 中国石油化工集团有限公司 (Sinopec Group)

ST: 为美好生活加油

OTT: Better Energy for Better Living

This example, chosen from the mission statement of Sinopec Group, has a pun “加油” translated as “better energy” in the original target text, failing to retain the complete connotation and a sense of classic. Sinopec Group engages in oil exploration, refining, storage, transportation and other related business, striving to help people achieve their aspirations for a better life, so the pun “加油” literally means “adding oil for sth”. Besides, it also can be used as “stepping up efforts or



cheering”. In English, the word “oil” basically means “to put oil onto or into sth” (*Oxford Advanced Learner’s English-Chinese Dictionary*). In October 2018, the Chinese-style expression “add oil” (加油) was added to the Oxford English Dictionary, expressing encouragement, incitement or support. Therefore, it is a coincidence that “加油” and “add oil” can generate same connotation and function. Accordingly, the OTT is suggested to be translated as “*Add oil* for Better Living”.

E.g. 8: 中海发展股份有限公司 (China Shipping Development Co.,Ltd.)

ST: 为世界“船”递能量

OTT: Deliver Energy for the world

In this example, the Chinese character “船” is a homophonic pun, sharing same *pinyin* with another Chinese character “传”. According to the philosophy and basic introduction of this shipping company, “船” represents its core business transporting coastal crude oil and coal while “传” unveils its sense of social responsibility that shipping energy to the whole society and conveying power to human beings are their lifelong pursuit. Therefore, it is well acknowledged that the original translated version fails to achieve the two layers of this pun by adopting the word “deliver”. However, the synonym of “deliver”, “ship” is much better, because firstly it functions as a noun, equal to “船” in Chinese and secondly functions as a verb, referring to “to send or transport sb/sth by ship or by another means of transport” (*Oxford Advanced Learner’s English-Chinese Dictionary*). Then, the OTT could be modified as “*Ship* Energy All Over the World”.

#### 2) Paraphrasing Pun With Two Terms

Pun is similar to wordplay, usually containing two meanings: the surface meaning and underlying meaning. Chinese pun has three main rhetoric functions: creating humorous effect, making a satire and provoking readers’ thought, but the pun in CMS mainly perform the third function, because a mission statement is a foundation of a decision with precise expression and positive tone. Just as Wang (2012) put forward that a corporate mission statement should be concise, powerful and easy to understand; it also should be closely linked with the enterprise vision, values, reflecting the uniqueness and professionalism of the enterprise. Therefore, it is critical to take its two referential meanings and its rhetoric function into consideration in the process of translating pun of CMS. We have mentioned the difficulty in translating pun, let alone the adoption of fit translation strategy, so we can try to paraphrasing puns with two terms instead of one word to convey the two meanings and reproduce the original context. At least, this method can bring complete meaning to the target readers and fully perform informative function. Otherwise, if the readers cannot get the point of the language, the CMS might fail to arouse their attention and appreciation further.

E.g. 9: 浙江吉利控股集团 (Zhejiang Geely Holding Group)

ST: 让世界充满吉利

OTT: Let Geely be a widely known brand around the world. (Previous Version)

A Sustainable Future, A Better World. (Present Version)

In the source text, the Chinese term “吉利” is a pun. Literally it refers to the brand name or company name “Geely” and also stands for “luck” in depth, meaning everything goes smoothly, which even appears in some Chinese ancient poems (E.g. 举家蒙欢, 吉利无殃——汉·焦贛《易林·蒙之姤》). However, in the original translated text, both versions fail to convey complete connotation and equivalent effect for English speakers. The present version basically ignore the source text, belong to a kind of creative writing. The previous version is a literal translation, giving priority to the company itself and showing the company’s desire to sell the cars to the world. Selling definitely does not equal to marketing, because the former

ignores the customers' acceptance and willingness to some extent. Therefore, the implied meaning can remedy the shortage, because bringing others luck and brand simultaneously instead of brand only might let others feel warm, which is the very application of vocative function. So the translated text could be modified as "Bring *Geely and luck* to our whole world".

E.g. 10: 人福医药集团股份公司 (Humanwell Healthcare Group)

ST: 让生命之树常青

OTT: To be a lasting global brand renowned for top quality healthcare solutions.

According to the Chinese mission statement and its interpretation by Humanwell Healthcare Group, the term "生命之树" could be understood as a pun. For one thing, it refers to human's health or life, because the company strives to offer high-quality medical products and services to improve people's life and make life vigorous and longer. For another, it stands for the development of the company or the brand which hopes to be everlasting by virtue of persistent research and development. However, OTT omits the first meaning and only focuses on the company itself, so foreign audiences might fail to acquire the same feeling as we Chinese audiences, naturally failing to achieve the vocative and informative function according to Newmark's opinion. Therefore, on the premise of the conciseness and clearness of the mission statement, the OTT can be changed as follows to ensure complete connotation of "生命之树", "To be an *everlasting brand* to help people *live longer*".

The strategy "paraphrasing pun into two terms" also can be applied in translating the examples listed in the above part *Pun in Chinese CMS* and most other examples in the data collected from Fortune China Top 500 from 2011-2021. For instance, in "用不锈智慧创造卓越品质" (*Shanxi Taigang Stainless Steel Co., LTD.*), "锈" and "朽" enjoys similar sound, forming a pun with the literal meaning "stainless" and deep meaning "enduring", so it is suggested to paraphrase the pun "不锈" into "*stainless and enduring*" to avoid the loss of connotation.

### Conclusion

The categories and translation of pun in CMS is a topic worthy of further discussion. It is the mission statement that distinguishes a company from others and describes the business objectives of the company for a long time (Fred David, 1989). On the basis of the above analysis, this paper has identified three main categories of pun in CMS and also put forward two translation strategies of pun in CMS with the guidance of Peter Newmark's text typology and communicative translation, namely, fit translation and paraphrasing pun in two terms. The former is not universal because of the rare coincidence between Chinese and English but really brilliant while the latter is much more common and easy to be applied.

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