

# Do readers trust translations? The reception of China's foreign-affairs discourse.

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Although national-image building is highly dependent on the way a country's foreign-affairs discourse is translated, the communicative effect upon *real* target readers has rarely undergone empirical scrutiny. Indeed, we know little about translation reception in general.

This empirical research goes beyond a narrow concern with translation products and instead focuses on *actual receptions* by taking China's translated foreign-affairs discourse as a case study. On the reception side, 22 Australian readers were categorized into six reader profiles were asked to rank four sets of translations. In each set, a Chinese start text was provided along with three English translations at different levels of translator intervention. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to examine the readers' textual comprehension, national-image reception, and reading satisfaction. To investigate any potential asymmetry between the reception and the production sides, the readers' answers were compared with those of 14 selected Chinese staff translators who were invited to evaluate the same sets of translations.

One major finding is that there are certain gaps between the communicative effects the official translators *think* they are offering and what their real readers *actually* receive. The study also suggests that reception is a matter of degree: the acceptance of a translation is a complex continuum rather than a simple binary opposition of absolute consensus vs. a completed refusal. The readers appear to distinguish ways of legitimizing an "ethically acceptable" translation and they seem to be ready to compromise and "satisfice" – i.e. accept translations that they know might be inadequate in terms of linguistic proficiency or contextual clarity. This shows that ethical criteria such as accountability, neutrality, and transparency have priority over language-quality solutions that simply conform to target conventions. To accept a translation, what matters most is whether readers can *trust* the text or not. By analyzing a range of explanatory variables including familiarity with the start culture, individual differences and the ideological conflicts that might impinge on the reader's decisions, the study proposes that *trust* plays a key role in determining the reception of translation, and that this is particularly evident in high-risk international communication.