



## Overtranslation and Discursive Reframing for Political Purposes: A Comparative Analysis of a CNA News Report and Its Khmer Version

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### Abstract

This article investigates the translation of a news segment from the English-language Channel News Asia (CNA) into Khmer, following the Thai–Cambodian border clash in late July 2025. Using a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) framework, it explores how word choice, structural shifts, and the addition of new content in the translation process reflect discursive manipulation to serve political interests. It argues that the Khmer version reconfigures the original message by transforming a journalistic report into a political affirmation, notably through the insertion of factual claims not found in the original text.

### Introduction

News translation extends beyond simple linguistic conversion; it operates as a complex site where power relations, ideological agendas, and discursive strategies intersect (Bielsa & Bassnett, 2009; Valdeón, 2015). Translators, consciously or otherwise, act as agents who can reshape meanings, amplify political narratives, and influence audience perceptions (Cheng, 2012). In particular, lexical choices, syntactic structures, and omissions or additions within translated texts can serve to reframe original messages—often aligning them with nationalistic or state-sponsored viewpoints (Schäffner, 2004). This article examines the Khmer-language version of a Channel News Asia (CNA) report to illustrate how the practice of "overtranslation" is employed not as a matter of fidelity, but as a means of discursive reframing. The analysis reveals how this strategic transformation subtly shifts a neutral international news report into an assertive rhetorical tool supporting Cambodia's official position during the July 2025 border tensions.

**Keywords:** news translation, political discourse, discursive reframing, Cambodia–Thailand conflict, ideology in translation

### Methodology

This study adopts Norman Fairclough's (1995) three-dimensional model of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as its analytical framework. CDA is particularly suited for uncovering the ideological and power-laden functions embedded within media discourse and translated texts. Fairclough's model operates on three interrelated levels of analysis:



Textual Analysis focuses on the micro-level of language, including vocabulary choices, grammatical structures, cohesion, and rhetorical devices. This level helps identify how seemingly neutral lexical and syntactic decisions may reflect ideological positioning or promote a particular narrative stance.

Interpretation addresses the processes of text production and reception. This involves considering the institutional context of both the original and the translated text, as well as the translator's potential role as an ideological agent who mediates meaning between the source and target cultures (Fairclough, 1995).

Explanation situates the discourse within its broader socio-political and historical context, exploring how discursive choices are shaped by, and contribute to, existing power structures, national ideologies, and strategic communication goals. In this study, the explanatory level is crucial in understanding how translation functions as a tool for reframing political narratives in the context of the 2025 Cambodia–Thailand border conflict.

By integrating these three dimensions, the analysis reveals how overtranslation and discursive shifts are not merely linguistic phenomena but also serve political purposes aligned with state-sponsored agendas.

### Texts Used for Analysis

The texts examined in this study include: (1) the original English-language news report delivered by a CNA anchor, sourced from the official Channel News Asia (CNA) YouTube channel, and (2) the Khmer-language dubbed translation of the same report, published on the official Facebook page of Samdech Hun Sen of Cambodia.

### News report from NCA anchor:

*"Thailand, early in the early hours of the ceasefire, claiming that Cambodian troops had broken that very tenuous ceasefire. Cambodia reacting to that by saying that is not the case. They have abided by that truth and are abiding to that truth right now. Uh what else has a Phnom Penh said in reaction to allegations from the Thai side?"*

*Well, they so you said it. The summary is that the position of the Cambodian Defense Ministry is very clear. It firmly rejects these accusations by the Thai side. And that, as you said, also earlier, so that it is committed to the truth to this cease-fire. In fact, I spent a large part of my morning and day talking randomly to villages here. We're about some 20 kilometers away from the active fighting. And many of them tell me that since 12:00 a.m., there's been no sounds of fighting. In the last 5 days, they will hear very, very regularly large sounds of shelling and bomb blasts. But for the last couple of hours, from 12:00 a.m. to now, there's no such sounds. Now, earlier in our program, we also spoke with a Cambodian assemblyman. Let's take a listen to what he said about the truth."*

Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w2n-tscz76E>



## Dubbing translation in Khmer:

“ប្រទេសថៃនៅប៉ុន្មានម៉ោងបន្ទាប់ពីបទល្មើសបាញ់ចូលជាធរមាន បានអះអាងថា ទាហានកម្ពុជាបានរំលោភបទល្មើសបាញ់ដែលបានព្រមព្រៀងគ្នា។ កម្ពុជាបានទាត់ចោលការលើកឡើងនេះ ដោយបានអះអាងថា កម្ពុជាបាននឹងកំពុងបន្តគោរពតាមកិច្ចព្រមព្រៀងបទល្មើសបាញ់យ៉ាងខ្ជាប់ខ្ជួន។ មកទល់ពេលនេះ គេទីក្រុងភ្នំពេញមានប្រតិកម្មអ្វីបន្ថែមទៀតទេចំពោះការចោទប្រកាន់របស់ទីក្រុងបានកកដុះចាស់។

ដូច វីស៊ី បានលើកឡើងអញ្ចឹង និយាយដោយខ្លី ដំបូងរបស់ក្រសួងការពារជាតិកម្ពុជាមានភាពច្បាស់លាស់មែនទែន។ កម្ពុជាបដិសេធយ៉ាងដាច់ណាត់ចំពោះការចោទប្រកាន់របស់ភាគីថៃ និងសង្កត់ធ្ងន់ថា កម្ពុជាប្រាជ្ញាចិត្តគោរពនៅបទល្មើសបាញ់ដែលបានប្រកាសរួមគ្នាដោយថ្នាក់ដឹកនាំកម្ពុជានិងថៃពីទីក្រុងភ្នំពេញនៅថ្ងៃទី 28 ខែកក្កដាកន្លងទៅ។ តាមការពិត ខ្ញុំបានចំណាយពេលមួយថ្ងៃក្នុងទំនងពេលព្រឹកនិងពេលថ្ងៃ ដដែលជាមួយអ្នកភូមិមួយចំនួននៅទីនេះ។ ទីតាំងនេះមានចម្ងាយប្រហែល ២០ គីឡូម៉ែត្រប៉ុណ្ណោះពីសមរភូមិប្រយុទ្ធរវាងកងទ័ពថៃនិងកម្ពុជា។ អ្នកភូមិជាច្រើនប្រាប់ខ្ញុំថា តាំងពីម៉ោង 12 លងអាធ្រាត្រថ្ងៃទី 28 ឈានចូលថ្ងៃទី 29 ខែកក្កដាមកនេះ គ្មានទៀតឡើយសំឡេងនៃការប្រយុទ្ធប្រដាប់អាវុធរវាងកងទ័ពថៃនិងកម្ពុជា។ នៅក្នុងរយៈពេល 5 ថ្ងៃចុងក្រោយនេះ អ្នកភូមិបានឮសំឡេងផ្លោងនិងការបំផ្លុះគ្រាប់បែកយ៉ាងទៀងទាត់ជាប្រចាំ ប៉ុន្តែពីរ បីម៉ោងបន្ទាប់ពីម៉ោង 12 អាធ្រាត្រ រហូតមកដល់ពេលនេះ សំឡេងគ្រាប់ផ្លោងនិងការបំផ្លុះគ្រាប់បែកគ្មានឮឡើងទៀតទេ។ មុននេះកម្មវិធីរបស់យើងក៏បានសម្ភាសន៍សមាជិកសភារបស់កម្ពុជាមួយរូបដែរ យើងទៅស្តាប់ការពិតពិតគាត់ទាំងអស់គ្នា។”

Retrieved from <https://www.facebook.com/hunsencambodia/videos/1974506069986899>

Both versions — (1) the original English–language report from CNA and (2) the Khmer–language translation—share the same overall structure and communicative intent. However, there are notable differences in terms of detail, tone, and political emphasis, as outlined below:

### Similarities:

Despite notable differences in tone and detail, a comparative analysis of the original English–language CNA report and its Khmer–language translation reveals several core similarities in content and structure. Both versions convey the same overarching narrative: Cambodia rejects Thailand’s accusation of violating the ceasefire and asserts its continued compliance with the agreement. This section outlines key points of alignment between the two texts, highlighting areas where the Khmer translation faithfully mirrors the original message, either through equivalent phrasing or consistent factual content. The similarities suggest a shared communicative intent, even as the stylistic and rhetorical framing differs.

Key Point	CNA Report (English)	Khmer Translation
Thai Accusation	Thailand accuses Cambodia of violating the ceasefire agreement.	Thailand accuses Cambodia of violating the ceasefire just hours after it took effect.
Cambodia’s Rejection	Cambodia “firmly rejects” the allegations.	Uses the phrase “បដិសេធយ៉ាងដាច់ណាត់” (categorically and strongly rejects).
Commitment to Ceasefire	Cambodia states it continues to respect the ceasefire.	Emphasizes “ប្រាជ្ញាចិត្តគោរព” (a determined commitment to respect the ceasefire).



On-the-Ground Evidence	CNA reporter says they spoke to villagers 20 km from the clash site.	Also mentions the 20 km distance, adding that no explosions were heard after midnight on July 28.
Interview with Cambodian Politicians	CNA states that interviews with Members of Parliament were conducted.	The Khmer version also states: “យើងទៅស្តាប់ការពិតពីគាត់ទាំងអស់គ្នា” (We went together to hear the truth from them).

### Differences in Content and Tone

While the Khmer translation of the CNA report retains the overall structure and factual framework of the original English version, significant differences emerge upon closer examination of tone, rhetorical choices, and added details. These distinctions reflect not just linguistic variation, but also divergent communicative strategies. The original CNA report maintains a neutral, journalistic tone, whereas the Khmer version adopts a more formal and assertive style that aligns closely with Cambodia’s official political stance. Furthermore, the Khmer translation introduces specific contextual information, such as the location and date of the ceasefire agreement, not present in the original report. The table below highlights these key differences, illustrating how translation can serve not only as a conduit for meaning, but also as a tool for narrative framing and ideological reinforcement.

Aspect of Comparison	CNA (English)	Khmer Translation
Tone/Style	Neutral news language with a balanced tone; does not take sides	Formal tone with a clear stance supporting the Cambodian government
Reference to Ceasefire Agreement	Does not mention the specific city where the ceasefire was agreed	Clearly states that the agreement was made in “Kuala Lumpur on 28 July”
Length and Level of Detail	Shorter; presented in the style of a live news report	Expanded with more detail, especially regarding villagers and absence of explosions
Reporter’s Reference	Reporter says: “spent a large part of my morning...”	Translated as “ខ្ញុំបានចំណាយពេល...” (I spent time...), using first person—sounds more formal
Closing Statement	Ends by stating they will go listen to Cambodian MPs	Uses inclusive and engaging phrasing: “យើងទៅស្តាប់ការពិត...” (Let’s go hear the truth...), inviting audience involvement

### The Findings:

The Khmer-language version claims that CNA reported, “Cambodia did not violate the ceasefire agreement made with Thailand on 28 July 2025 in Malaysia, as alleged by the Thai government.” This statement does not fully align with the original English-language report by CNA. While the core message—that Cambodia denies violating the ceasefire—is present in both versions, the Khmer translation introduces new details and rephrases the source in a way that suggests a more official and assertive stance. Specifically, the original CNA report did not mention the location of the ceasefire agreement (Malaysia) or the precise date of the accord. These additions in the Khmer version reflect a



reframing of the original message, embedding information that was not part of the English-language broadcast. This suggests that the Khmer version functions not merely as a translation, but as a strategic rearticulation tailored to reinforce Cambodia's official narrative.

## Content-Based Analysis

### Original CNA Statement (English):

- “Cambodia reacting to that by saying that is not the case. They have abided by that truth and are abiding to that truth right now.”

### Literal Translation:

- “Cambodia responded by stating that it is not true. They have adhered to that truth and continue to do so at present.”

This statement contains a general denial of the accusation without referencing any specific agreement, location, or timeframe. Notably, there is no mention of Malaysia or the date of the ceasefire agreement in the original CNA report. Therefore, any such detail found in the Khmer version is not a direct translation but rather an interpretive addition—one that reframes the message by embedding specific geopolitical references absent from the source text.

### *The text in Khmer:*

“កម្ពុជាមិនបានឆ្លើស នឹងបទល្មើសបាញ់ដែលកម្ពុជាថា បានព្រមព្រៀងគ្នានៅប្រទេសម៉ាឡេស៊ី កាលពីថ្ងៃទី ២៨ កក្កដា ឆ្នាំ២០២៥ ដូចការចោទប្រកាន់របស់រាជរដ្ឋាភិបាលថៃនោះទេ”

### *The text in English:*

“Cambodia did not violate the ceasefire agreement that Cambodia and Thailand reached in Malaysia on 28 July 2025, as alleged by the Thai government.”

## Conclusion

In summary, while both the original CNA report and the Khmer-language version convey Cambodia's denial of the ceasefire violation, the two texts diverge in how the information is framed and attributed. The CNA report presents a neutral account, mentioning Cambodia's position without specifying the origin or date of the ceasefire agreement. In contrast, the Khmer version includes additional context, such as naming Malaysia and the date, 28 July 2025, which is absent from the source text. Moreover, although the CNA reporter's statements are cited, the Khmer version expands upon them in ways that imply a stronger assertion than what was actually communicated. These additions may not



constitute outright misinformation, but they reflect an interpretive shift that transforms journalistic reporting into a politically resonant message aligned with Cambodia’s official narrative.

Issue	CNA (English)	Khmer Statement
Denial of Violation	Clearly stated	Clearly stated
Reference to Ceasefire Agreement	Mentions “ceasefire” but does not specify origin	Specifies that it was agreed in “Malaysia on 28 July 2025”
Claimed as Direct CNA Reporting	Spoken by the CNA reporter	Expands beyond what was actually stated in the original CNA report

#### Recommendation:

The Khmer statement does not constitute a distortion, but rather a summarized interpretive expansion of what CNA reported. It adds contextual information—specifically the location and date of the agreement—which were not mentioned in the original English version.

However, if it is claimed to be a direct quote from the CNA reporter, it would not be 100% accurate compared to the original source.

There is evidence of mistranslation or at the very least, overtranslation in the Khmer version when compared to the original English report by CNA, particularly in at least two key aspects, as follows:

#### Comparative Table: Original English Version vs. Khmer Translation

Note	CNA Original (English)	Khmer Translation	Analysis
1. Ceasefire Location and Date	Mentions only “ceasefire” without specifying “Malaysia” or 28 July.	“...the ceasefire agreement that Cambodia and Thailand reached in Malaysia on 28 July 2025.”	Overtranslation — This information does not appear in the original CNA report.
2. Attribution to CNA Reporter	CNA reporter simply states: “Cambodia rejects Thai claims...”	“Please listen to the CNA reporter... who confirmed that...”	Interpretive Expansion — CNA did not “confirm” Cambodia’s innocence; it merely reported Cambodia’s position.
3. Tone and Register	Neutral tone using terms like “claims,” “reacting,” and “they say.”	Uses assertive expressions such as “confirmed” and “did not violate.”	Shift in Tone — Changes the reporter’s neutral stance into a tone of certainty, altering the intended message.
4. Scope of Factuality	Reporter relays what locals said: “they heard no fighting.”	States: “confirmed that Cambodia did not violate...”	From ‘reporting’ to ‘asserting’ — Transforms a reported perspective into



			a definitive statement, misrepresenting the original news intent.
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### Implications and Recommendations for Future Research

The findings of this study highlight the complex role of translation in international media discourse, particularly in politically sensitive contexts. The analysis demonstrates that translation can serve not merely as a channel for information transfer, but also as a strategic tool for discursive reframing aligned with state narratives. The Khmer version of the CNA report reveals how overtranslation and the insertion of contextual data—such as the date and location of the ceasefire agreement—can reconfigure a neutral report into a politically affirming statement. While such additions may enhance local relevance and audience resonance, they also blur the boundaries between reporting and political messaging, raising ethical questions about the fidelity of translated journalism.

These findings have broader implications for the study of news translation, particularly in regions where political tensions and media control intersect. They underscore the importance of critically examining the translator's role not only as a linguistic mediator but also as a potential ideological agent. This is especially pertinent in Southeast Asia, where state-aligned media outlets often play a central role in shaping public discourse and national identity.

### Recommendations for Future Research

**Comparative Multilingual Studies:** Future research could expand this case study by comparing the CNA report's translations into other regional languages—such as Thai, Vietnamese, or Lao—to assess whether similar discursive shifts occur across different political and cultural environments.

**Audience Reception Analysis:** It would be valuable to explore how target audiences interpret and respond to translated news content. Ethnographic or survey-based research could uncover whether readers perceive the translated messages as journalistic, propagandistic, or a blend of both.

**Translator Agency and Institutional Pressures:** Further qualitative research should investigate the role of institutional guidelines, editorial constraints, and political pressures on translators working for state media outlets. Interviews with translators and editors could offer insights into the extent of autonomy or coercion involved in reframing news discourse.

**Corpus-Based Approaches:** Building a parallel corpus of original news reports and their translations across multiple conflict events could enable systematic identification of recurring patterns of overtranslation, omission, or ideological shifts. This would allow for more generalizable conclusions about the discursive functions of translation in politically charged contexts.



**Ethical Frameworks in News Translation:** Given the ethical ambiguities raised by interpretive expansion in politically sensitive news translation, future studies should also engage with normative questions: What constitutes ethical news translation in high-stakes geopolitical contexts? How can translators balance fidelity with cultural relevance without compromising journalistic integrity?

By deepening our understanding of how translation operates as a site of ideological negotiation, researchers can better assess its impact on international relations, media credibility, and public perception—particularly in regions marked by contested narratives and information asymmetry.

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