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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

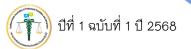
The texts examined in this study include: (1) the original English-language news report delivered by a CNA anchor, sourced from the official Channel News Asia (CNA) YouTube channel, and (2) the Khmer-language dubbed translation of the same report, published on the official Facebook page of Samdech Hun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

"ប្រទេសថៃនៅប៉ុន្មានម៉ោងបន្ទាប់ពីបទឈប់ជាញ់ចូលជាធរមាន បានអះអាងថា ទាហានកម្ពុជាបានរំលោភបទឈប់ជាញ់ ដែលបានព្រមព្រៀងគ្នា។ កម្ពុជាបានទាត់ចោលការលើកឡើងនេះ ដោយបានអះអាងថា កម្ពុជាបាននិងកំពុងបន្តគោរពតាម កិច្ចព្រមព្រៀងបទឈប់ជាញ់យ៉ាងខ្ជាប់ខ្លួន។ មកទល់ពេលនេះ តើទីក្រុងភ្នំពេញមានប្រតិកម្មអ្វីបន្ថែមទៀតទេចំពោះការចោទ ប្រកាន់របស់ទីក្រុងបាងកកដូច្នេះចាស់[,]

ដូច វ៉ៃស៊ូ បានលើកឡើងអញឹង និយាយដោយខ្លី ដំហររបស់ក្រសួងការពារដាតិកម្ពុជាមានភាពច្បាស់លាស់មែនទែន។ កម្ពុជា បដិសេធយ៉ាងដាច់ណាត់ចំពោះការចោទប្រកាន់របស់ភាគីថៃ និងសង្កត់ធ្ងន់ថា កម្ពុជាប្រាថ្នាចិត្តគោរពនៅបទឈប់បាញ់ដែល បានប្រកាសរួមគ្នាដោយថ្នាក់ដឹកនាំកម្ពុជានិងថែពីទីក្រុងកូឡាឡាំពួរនៅថ្ងៃទី 28 ខែកក្កដាកន្លងទៅ។ តាមការពិត ខ្ញុំបាន ចំណាយពេលមួយផ្នែកធំទាំងពេលព្រឹកនិងពេលថ្ងៃ ដដែកជាមួយអ្នកភូមិមួយចំនួននៅទីនេះ។ ទីតាំងនេះមានចម្ងាយប្រហែល គែ 20 គីឡូម៉ែត្រប៉ុណ្ណេះពីសមរភូមិប្រយុទ្ធរវាងកងទ័ពថៃនិងកម្ពុជា។ អ្នកភូមិជាច្រើនប្រាប់ខ្ញុំថា តាំងពីម៉ោង 12 រំលងអាធ្រាត្រ ថ្ងៃទី 28 ឈានចូលថ្ងៃទី 29 ខែកក្កដាមកនេះ គ្មានទៀតឡើយស់ឡេងនៃការប្រយុទ្ធប្រដាប់អាវុធរវាងកងទ័ពថៃនិងកម្ពុជា។ នៅ ក្នុងរយៈពេល 5 ថ្ងៃចុងក្រោយនេះ អ្នកភូមិបានឮសំឡេងផ្លោងនិងការបំផ្លុះគ្រាប់បែកយ៉ាងទៀងទាត់ជាប្រចាំ ប៉ុន្តែពីរៈបីម៉ោង បន្ទាប់ពីម៉ោង 12 អាធ្រាត្រ រហូតមកដល់ពេលនេះ សំឡេងគ្រាប់ផ្ដោងនិងការបំផ្លុះគ្រាប់បែកគ្នានឮឡើងទៀតទេ។ មុននេះកម្ពុ វិធីរបស់យើងក៏បានសម្គាសន៍សមាជិកសភារបស់កម្ពុជាមួយរូបដែរ យើងទៅស្ដាប់ការពិតពីគាត់ទាំងអស់គ្នា។"

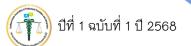
Retrieved from https://www.facebook.com/hunsencambodia/videos/1974506069986899

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	Thailand accuses Cambodia of violating the ceasefire just	
	ceasefire agreement.	hours after it took effect.	
Cambodia's Rejection	Cambodia "firmly rejects" the allegations.	Uses the phrase "បនិសេធយ៉ាងងាច់ណាត់" (categorically and	
		strongly rejects).	
Commitment to	Cambodia states it continues to respect the	Emphasizes "ប្រាផ្លាចិត្តគោរព" (a determined commitment to	
Ceasefire	ceasefire.	respect the ceasefire).	



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

Differences in Content and Tone

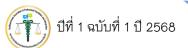
While the Khmer translation of the CNA report retains the overall structure and factual framework of the original English version, significant differences emerge upon closer examination of tone, rhetorical choices, and added details. These distinctions reflect not just linguistic variation, but also 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	Formal tone with a clear stance supporting the Cambodian
	tone; does not take sides	government
Reference to Ceasefire	Does not mention the specific city where	Clearly states that the agreement was made in "Kuala
Agreement	the ceasefire was agreed	Lumpur on 28 July"
Length and Level of Detail	Shorter; presented in the style of a live	Expanded with more detail, especially regarding villagers and
	news report	absence of explosions
Reporter's Reference	Reporter says: "spent a large part of my	Translated as -ខ្លាំបានចំណាយពេល (I spent time), using first
	morning"	person—sounds more formal
Closing Statement	Ends by stating they will go listen to	Uses inclusive and engaging phrasing: -យើងទៅស្ដាប់ការពិត
	Cambodian MPs	(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

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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:

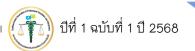
-កម្ពុជាមិនបានល្មើស នឹងបទឈប់បាញ់ដែលកម្ពុជា ថៃ បានព្រមព្រៀងគ្នានៅប្រទេសម៉ាឡេសុី កាលពីថ្ងៃទី ២៨ កក្កដា ឆ្នាំ២០២៥ ដូចការ ចោទប្រកាន់របស់រាជរដ្ឋាភិបាលថៃនោះទេ

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:

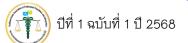
The Khmer statement does not constitute a distortion, but rather a summarized interpretive expansion of what CNA reported. It adds contextual information—specifically the location and date of the agreement—which were not mentioned in the original English version.

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



	a definitive statement, misrepresenting
	the original news intent.

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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