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Translation Quality of Chinese Diplomatic Discourse by NMT and LLMs Based on Multidimensional Quality Metrics

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Abstract: ***This research studies the translation of Chinese diplomatic discourse. In particular, it studies the statement of Lin Jian, the spokesman of the Chinese Foreign Affairs Ministry, on the incident of tariffs in 2025. For this analysis, the reference translations are on the official English website of China Daily what are published as their translation. According to a research study, the paper studies the translation performance of four NMT systems, with NiuTrans, Youdao Translate, Google Translate and DeepL. At the same time, the translation performance of four LLMs, Deepseek, ERNIE 4.5 Turbo, GPT-4.0, and Gemini is also studied. These translation performances are tested for a commercial machine translation system, which is usually used to translate Chinese diplomatic discourse. The results show that Large Language Models (LLMs) appear to have a stronger potential than Neural Machine Translation (NMT) systems, especially regarding cultural metaphors and abstract concepts. Despite their strengths, NMT systems and LLMs have notable shortcomings. This refers to misunderstanding concepts, not including information and generating low-quality language. In the future, more studies could explore translation strategies to promote more accurate translations. Thus, helping improve communication between parties.***

Keywords: Neural Machine Translation (NMT); Large Language Models (LLMs); Translation of Chinese Diplomatic Discourse; Translation Quality Assessment.

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1. Introduction

Characterized by its rich content, diverse forms, and distinct features, Chinese diplomatic discourse is a vital conduit through which the global community can obtain an authentic understanding of China [1]. Therefore, improving the quality of translation and dissemination effectiveness of Chinese diplomatic discourse is crucial not only for enabling the world to hear China's voice but, more importantly, for ensuring global comprehension and engagement with China's messages, thereby enhancing China's international discursive influence and constructing a positive global image [2].

On February 1, 2025, the U.S. government announced the imposition of a 10% tariff on all Chinese goods imported into the United States, citing the issue of fentanyl as a pretext [3]. In response, China implemented retaliatory tariff measures on specific goods imported from the United States, effective from February 10, 2025 [4]. The trade dispute experienced a temporary easing during the China-U.S. Geneva Economic and Trade Talks held on May 12, 2025 [5]. Throughout this period, the incident garnered significant international attention. Lin Jian, the spokesperson for the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, engaged in solemn and serious representations and negotiations with the U.S. side.

This study takes this incident as the starting point. It selects the statements made by Lin Jian regarding this incident as the source text and utilizes the translations published on the official English website of China Daily as reference translations. Additionally, it employs four leading Neural Machine Translation (NMT) systems (NiuTrans, Youdao Translate, Google Translate, and DeepL) and four Large Language Models (LLMs) (Deepseek, ERNIE 4.5 Turbo, GPT-4.0, and Gemini) as translation tools. The primary objective is to examine the translation performance of

these NMT systems and LLMs in the context of Chinese diplomatic discourse translation.

From a theoretical perspective, this study investigates the mechanisms by which various translation technologies process Chinese diplomatic discourse. It provides novel analytical frameworks and methodological insights for related academic fields. The findings contribute to the enrichment of translation theory and practice while also promoting interdisciplinary integration and innovation. From a practical standpoint, this study offers substantial contributions to the global communication of China's diplomatic discourse. By optimizing translation strategies in NMT systems and LLMs, it effectively reduces cross-cultural misunderstandings and biases. This, in turn, enhances China's influence within international discourse and strengthens its soft power. Additionally, the study facilitates the accurate transmission of culturally embedded values inherent in Chinese diplomatic discourse. It thereby reduces intercultural friction, fosters harmonious international relations, and creates a more constructive environment for global cooperation.

Building upon this foundation, the study addresses two pivotal research questions:

1) How do different NMT systems and LLMs approach the translation of Chinese diplomatic discourse?

2) What are the comparative performance metrics of various NMT and LLM approaches in rendering Chinese diplomatic discourse?

2. Literature Review

2.1 The Study on the Translation of Chinese Diplomatic Discourse

Academic research on the translation of China's diplomatic discourse primarily focuses on three main dimensions: terminology standardization and corpus development, translation strategies and methodologies, and cross-cultural communicative efficacy.

Scholarly research on terminology standardization and corpus development has primarily focused on analyzing diplomatic discourse corpora to elucidate translation strategies for diplomatic terminology and discourse [6-13]. Studies in this domain have revealed that the translation of diplomatic discourse is a multidimensional process, encompassing linguistic, cultural, ideological, and cognitive factors. For instance, corpus-based analyses have demonstrated how translations reflect attitudinal shifts, employ metaphor translation strategies, and mediate the construction of national images. This process extends beyond mere linguistic conversion, facilitating the transference of cultural meanings and playing a pivotal role in shaping international discursive power.

Scholarly research on translation strategies and methodologies has systematically examined party and government documents, speeches by political leaders, and specialized terminology to investigate how translation strategies convey the ideological foundations of China's diplomatic discourse [14-21]. This body of research highlights that cultural elements, in particular, hold significant importance in cross-cultural dissemination. Translators are required to render cultural subtexts with nuance in order to facilitate China's cultural diplomacy. As cultural mediators, translators employ theoretical frameworks to bridge textual and ideological gaps, thereby enhancing China's global discursive influence through high-quality translation outputs.

Scholarly research in the domain of cross-cultural communicative efficacy predominantly investigates international media renditions of Chinese diplomatic terminology and their dissemination patterns in global news outlets. These studies focus on overseas reception dynamics, particularly highlighting the interplay between cultural adaptation strategies and audience perception gaps [22-28]. These studies indicate that the cross-cultural efficacy of diplomatic discourse translation is shaped by multiple interdependent factors, including translational approaches, media framing mechanisms, audience reception patterns, and cultural contextualization. This process transcends mere linguistic conversion to constitute a form of cultural transmission.

2.2 Machine Translation (MT) and Translation Quality Assessment (TQA)

The field of Machine Translation (MT) has undergone a significant transformation through the integration of

artificial intelligence, neural networks, and deep learning technologies. This evolution has seen MT progress from rule-based systems (RBMT) to contemporary Neural Machine Translation (NMT) architectures that leverage cloud computing and big data analytics [29]. The emergence of Large Language Models (LLMs) has further revolutionized the paradigm. Characterized by their enhanced generation capabilities, improved contextual understanding, fluency, and accuracy, LLMs represent a major step forward in MT [30].

Despite these significant advancements in accuracy, MT still struggles with culturally embedded expressions and creative linguistic devices such as puns, metaphors, and slogans. This is due to its inability to fully contextualize socio-cultural nuances, which often leads to semantic inaccuracies, syntactic misplacements, and grammatical errors. As a result, there remains a quality gap between machine translation and human translation [31].

From the perspective of Translation Quality Assessment (TQA), the study of translation quality has long been a crucial research direction within the field of translation studies. TQA offers practical guidance for translators by analyzing the strengths and weaknesses of machine translation in structural processing and vocabulary selection [32]. It also assists practitioners in selecting appropriate translation methods based on task requirements.

Contemporary research categorizes MT quality assessment into three primary methodological approaches [33]:

1) human evaluation, which employs rating and ranking techniques;

2) reference-based automated metrics, which are distinguished into non-linguistic, light-linguistic, and heavy-linguistic paradigms;

3) reference-free estimation, which utilizes either manually engineered features or characteristics derived from neural networks.

This study employs a rating-based human evaluation approach, utilizing the Multidimensional Quality Metrics (MQM) framework. Originally developed by the German Research Center for Artificial Intelligence (DFKI) under the EU-funded QTLaunchPad initiative, the MQM framework is currently maintained by the QT21 consortium [34].

The MQM framework systematically categorizes translation errors into seven primary dimensions: terminology, accuracy, linguistic conventions, style, locale conventions, audience appropriateness, and design and markup [35]. Within each dimension, errors are further classified into four distinct severity levels: Neutral Severity Level, Minor Severity Level, Major Severity Level, and Critical Severity Level [36]. This hierarchical structure enables a nuanced and comprehensive evaluation of translation quality by accounting for both the type and severity of errors.

3. Materials and Methods

3.1 Text Selection

The source text is a 196-character excerpt from the official statement issued by Lin Jian, Spokesperson of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of China, concerning the 2025 Tariff Incident. The selection of this text is based on two primary considerations.

First, the statements issued by the spokesperson of the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs are direct reflections of China's official stance towards the United States and carry significant political and strategic implications. Phrases such as "奉陪到底" (fight to the end) and "得道多助，失道寡助" (a just cause enjoys abundant support while an unjust one finds little) exemplify typical diplomatic discourse and are representative of the language used in official communications. Their inclusion aligns with the objective of this study, which is to examine the translation capabilities of Chinese diplomatic discourse.

Second, these phrases are unique Chinese idioms and proverbs. Accurate translation of such expressions requires a profound understanding of the relevant cultural and historical context, thereby precluding the feasibility of literal translation. Consequently, these phrases are deemed appropriate as exemplars to assess the performance of current

artificial intelligence technologies in translating Chinese diplomatic discourse.

3.2 Selection of Translation Tools

To ensure comprehensive coverage of contemporary translation technologies, this study selected a diverse range of translation tools. Specifically, four Neural Machine Translation (NMT) tools and four Large Language Models (LLMs) were chosen, encompassing both domestic and international sources. This selection was made to reflect the current state of the art in machine translation and to provide a balanced comparison across different technological paradigms. Detailed information regarding the selected translation tools, including their origins, architectures, and key features, is provided in Table 1.

Table 1: Translation Tool Information Sheet

Category	Products
Neural Machine Translation (NMT)	NiuTrans, Youdao Translate, Google Translate, DeepL
Large Language Models (LLMs)	Deepseek, ERNIE-4.5, GPT-4.0, Gemini

For the selection of NMT systems, this study primarily referenced the evaluation results from Intento's *The State of Machine Translation 2024* [37]. Based on these evaluations, four translation engines that demonstrated notable performance in the Chinese-English translation direction were chosen. This selection ensures that the NMT tools included in this study are representative of the current state of the art in Neural Machine Translation (NMT), particularly in the context of translating between the English and Chinese languages.

In the selection of LLMs, this study has chosen four mainstream general-purpose models. The selection process was guided by the evaluation results from Tsinghua University's *SuperBench Large Model Comprehensive Ability Evaluation Report* [38], which provides a comprehensive assessment of the capabilities of various LLMs. Additionally, the popularity and frequency of discussions surrounding these models on social platforms were taken into account to ensure that the selected models are widely recognized and utilized in the field (see Table 1). To ensure that the latest advancements in LLMs are captured in this study, the models chosen are all the most recent versions available to users at the time of the experiment. This approach allows for an up-to-date examination of the performance of LLMs in the specific task of translating Chinese diplomatic discourse.

3.3 Research Procedure

First, the research procedure commenced with the systematic collection of translations from the selected translation tools. For Neural Machine Translation (NMT) tools, the source text was individually input in plain text format into the designated original text box of each NMT web version. The corresponding NMT translations were then retrieved directly from the output interface.

For Large Language Models (LLMs), a standardized prompt, "Chinese to English," was uniformly employed. The source text, formatted in plain text, was individually entered into the dialogue box of each LLM's web version. The translations generated by the LLMs were subsequently obtained from their respective output interfaces.

Second, following the collection of translations, the subsequent step involved the compilation and statistical analysis of the data. Given that this study is designed to compare and analyze the performance of Machine Translation (NMT) systems and Large Language Models (LLMs) in the translation of Chinese diplomatic discourse into English, the translations of the phrases "奉陪到底" and "得道多助，失道寡助" were specifically included in the evaluation scope. These phrases were selected due to their distinct characteristics as Chinese idiomatic expressions and their relevance to the study's focus on diplomatic discourse.

The translation results generated by the NMT systems and LLMs for the two phrases were separately integrated. Similar translation methods were identified and merged to streamline the analysis. Subsequently, the frequency of each unique translation method was individually counted. This process ensured a systematic and objective assessment of the translation strategies employed by both groups of translation tools, facilitating a comprehensive comparison of their performance in handling culturally and politically nuanced expressions.

Third, the evaluation criteria were established. This study adopted the MQM-Full error classification system from

the Multidimensional Quality Metrics (MQM) model as a foundational framework for assessing translation quality. The criteria were refined and adapted to align with the specific characteristics of the translations under examination, ensuring that they are both relevant and applicable to the context of translating Chinese diplomatic discourse into English. The finalized evaluation criteria, along with illustrative examples, are presented in Table 2. This approach ensures a systematic and objective evaluation process, grounded in established translation quality assessment standards while accommodating the unique challenges posed by the subject matter.

Fourth, evaluate the quality of the translations and collect statistical data.

Table 2: Translation Evaluation Criteria and Examples

Translation Quality	Explanation	Example
correct translation	The translation accurately and comprehensively conveys both the explicit information and the underlying nuances of the original text while adhering to idiomatic English expression.	“奉陪到底” is translated as “fight to the end”; “得道多助，失道寡助” is translated as “A just cause enjoys abundant support while an unjust one finds little.”
mistranslation	Error occurring when the target content does not accurately represent the source content.	“奉陪到底” is translated as “will accompany them to the end”; “得道多助，失道寡助” is translated as “If you get more help, but if you lose it, you will get little help”;
undertranslation	Error occurring in the target content that is inappropriately less specific than the source content.	“奉陪到底” is translated as “will accompany it to the end”; “得道多助，失道寡助” is translated as “Those who follow the right path will have many supporters, while those who go against it will have few.”
omission	Error where content present in the source is missing in the target.	Omitting the translation of “奉陪到底” or “得道多助，失道寡助”
unidiomatic style	The translation is unnatural and does not conform to idiomatic English usage.	“奉陪到底” is translated as “I humbly accompany you to the end”; “得道多助，失道寡助” is translated as “He who is just will have many to help him, but he who is unjust will have few.”

4. Results and Discussion

This study examines the translation performance of Neural Machine Translation (NMT) and Large Language Models (LLMs) in rendering the Chinese phrases “奉陪到底” and “得道多助，失道寡助” into English, using the translations published on the official English website of China Daily as reference translations. The evaluation outcomes for the phrase “奉陪到底” are presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Translation Quality of NMT and LLMs for the Phrase “奉陪到底” (fight to the end)

Translation Quality	NMT		LLMs	
	Quantity	Proportion	Quantity	Proportion
correct translation	1	25%	2	50%
mistranslation	0	0	0	0
undertranslation	3	75%	1	25%
omission	0	0	1	25%
unidiomatic style	0	0	0	0

In the official reference translation, the phrase “奉陪到底” is rendered as “fight to the end.” Upon conducting translation tests with four distinct Neural Machine Translation (NMT) systems, it was observed that only Google Translate produced a translation that precisely matched the reference translation, thereby being classified as correct. Conversely, the translations generated by the remaining three NMT systems exhibited varying degrees of semantic deviation and stylistic problems.

The translations of “奉陪到底” by Niutrans, DeepL, and Youdao Translate are rendered as “will surely accompany it to the end,” “will certainly accompany it to the end,” and “will surely stand by it to the end,” respectively. These translations employ the verbs “accompany” and “stand by.” While “accompany” is a literal translation of “奉陪,” it entirely omits the resolute and combative tone inherent in the original Chinese phrase. This rendering is overly mild and does not align with the context in which such an expression is typically used in diplomatic settings. The verb “stand by,” which conveys meanings of “support” or “adhere to,” is somewhat stronger than “accompany.” However, it still falls short of accurately capturing the essence of “奉陪到底.” Instead, it is more appropriate for

expressing a supportive stance rather than the adversarial intent that the original phrase conveys.

The incorporation of adverbs such as "surely" and "certainly" in these translations results in a degree of redundancy and imparts a colloquial tone to the language style. This is incongruous with the formal and precise requirements of diplomatic discourse. Given that these translations fail to fully capture the semantic intensity of the original text and its pragmatic functions within a diplomatic context, they are collectively classified as undertranslations.

Among the four Large Language Models (LLMs) evaluated, only Deepseek and ERNIE-4.5 successfully conveyed the semantic connotation of the phrase "奉陪到底." In contrast, ChatGPT's translation, "will accompany it to the end," exhibited a similar issue to that observed in the translations produced by the three Neural Machine Translation (NMT) systems previously discussed. Specifically, the verb choice in ChatGPT's translation diminished the original phrase's adversarial semantic features, resulting in an undertranslation. Notably, Gemini failed to translate the idiom altogether, which is categorized as an omission.

These findings highlight the common challenges that contemporary machine translation systems encounter when dealing with diplomatic discourse. Firstly, there is a notable deficiency in comprehending the core semantics of culturally loaded terms. Secondly, it is challenging to strike a balance between maintaining the formality required in a diplomatic context and achieving semantic completeness. It is worth noting that some Large Language Models (LLMs) demonstrate potential advantages over Neural Machine Translation (NMT) systems. However, overall, both LLMs and NMT systems still need to enhance their domain adaptation training specifically for diplomatic texts. This is particularly crucial in optimizing the preservation of semantic intensity and the accurate transmission of pragmatic functions.

Table 4: Translation Quality of NMT and LLMs for the Phrase "得道多助，失道寡助" (A just cause enjoys abundant support while an unjust one finds little)

Translation Quality	NMT		LLMs	
	Quantity	Proportion	Quantity	Proportion
correct translation	0	0	2	50%
mistranslation	1	25%	0	0
undertranslation	2	50%	2	50%
omission	1	25%	0	0
unidiomatic style	0	0	0	0

In the official reference translations, the phrase "得道多助，失道寡助" is rendered as "A just cause enjoys abundant support while an unjust one finds little." Upon conducting translation tests with four Neural Machine Translation (NMT) systems as showing in Table 4, it was observed that none of the NMT systems accurately conveyed the meaning of the original text.

Google Translate renders the phrase as "The righteous will have many supporters, while the unrighteous will have few." This translation reduces the abstract concept of "道" to a binary opposition of "righteous/unrighteous," thereby omitting the rich philosophical connotations inherent in the original term. Additionally, the language style of this translation is overly colloquial, which detracts from the formal and precise expression required for diplomatic discourse.

Youdao Translate renders the phrase as "Those who follow the right path will have many supporters, while those who go against it will have few." This translation employs the term "right path," thereby concretizing the abstract concept of "道" into a tangible "path." As a result, the translation diminishes the philosophical depth and abstraction of the original term. Additionally, the language style is characterized by a colloquial tone, which, while suitable for popular explanations, does not align with the formal requirements of diplomatic contexts. Due to these limitations, both this translation and the previously discussed ones are categorized as undertranslation.

Niutrans provides an inaccurate translation, rendering the phrase as "If you get more help, but if you lose it, you will get little help." This translation misinterprets the meaning of the original text and reduces the profound philosophical proposition to a simplistic assumption, entirely omitting the core concept of "道". Due to these significant deviations, it is categorized as a mistranslation. In contrast, DeepL's approach results in an omission, failing to provide a translation for this phrase.

Among the four Large Language Models (LLMs) evaluated in Table 4, Deepseek and ERNIE-4.5 successfully captured the semantic connotations of the idiom "得道多助，失道寡助." In contrast, ChatGPT's translation, "Those who are righteous will gain support, while those who are unjust will find few allies," largely preserves the intended meaning. However, the use of "righteous" introduces a moral dimension that is not fully aligned with the original concept of "道," which is more accurately described as "the just cause." Additionally, the term "allies" is overly specific, as it implies a narrower scope of support compared to the broader sense of "support" that the original idiom conveys. A more precise translation would retain the general notion of "support" rather than limiting it to "allies."

Gemini's translation, "A just cause attracts much support, while an unjust one finds little," is semantically accurate. However, the verb "attracts" introduces a degree of subjectivity and is less idiomatic compared to "enjoys," which is more commonly used in formal contexts to convey the idea of receiving or obtaining something. Given this nuance, the translations provided by both ChatGPT and Gemini, while conveying the general meaning, fall short of the optimal expression. As a result, they are also categorized as undertranslation.

The test results reveal a marked disparity in the translation of Chinese diplomatic discourse between Neural Machine Translation (NMT) systems and Large Language Models (LLMs). NMT systems generally exhibited suboptimal performance.

In contrast, Large Language Models (LLMs) demonstrated superior semantic comprehension capabilities. Notably, the domestic systems Deepseek and ERNIE-4.5 accurately rendered the meaning of the original text. While ChatGPT and Gemini exhibited some bias in term selection, they largely preserved the core meaning. This distinction underscores the strengths of LLMs in handling abstract concepts and adapting to cultural nuances, while also highlighting the pervasive challenges faced by current machine translation systems in effectively mastering the stylistic requirements of diplomatic discourse. The research findings indicate that enhancing the quality of translating diplomatic discourse necessitates a focus on improving the ability to convey abstract concepts and on enhancing the adaptability of register style.

5. Conclusion

This study employs the speech contents of the spokesperson from the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs regarding the 2025 tariff event as the source text for analysis. To conduct a comprehensive evaluation, four representative Neural Machine Translation (NMT) tools have been selected, encompassing both domestic and international options: NiuTrans, Youdao Translate, Google Translate, and DeepL. Additionally, four Large Language Models (LLMs) have been chosen to process the English translation of the selected source text, namely Deepseek, ERNIE 4.5 Turbo, GPT-4.0, and Gemini.

The research indicates that Large Language Models (LLMs) generally exhibit greater potential than Neural Machine Translation (NMT) systems in translating Chinese diplomatic discourse. This advantage is particularly evident in their ability to comprehend cultural metaphors and abstract concepts that are prevalent in such texts. However, both LLMs and NMT systems require specialized optimization tailored to the diplomatic domain to enhance their performance.

Machine Translation (MT), while a valuable tool, has inherent limitations when applied to diplomatic discourse translation. These limitations necessitate a hybrid approach that combines machine translation with human proofreading to ensure accuracy and nuance. Furthermore, domain-specific adaptation training is essential to improve the translation quality in the context of diplomatic texts.

In the context of disseminating Chinese diplomatic discourse externally, it is crucial to strike a balance between "accuracy" and "acceptability." Accuracy ensures that the original meaning and intent are preserved, while acceptability addresses the need for the translation to be comprehensible and culturally appropriate for the target audience.

This study acknowledges certain limitations. Specifically, the selection of source texts was confined to the

speeches of the Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson, and these were exclusively derived from the context of the 2025 event in which the U.S. government announced a 10% tariff increase on all Chinese goods imported to the U.S. due to the fentanyl issue. This narrow focus results in a limited range of sample types, potentially constraining the generalizability of the findings.

The scope of this research is relatively limited, as it focuses primarily on the diplomatic discourse surrounding specific events and does not extend to more broadly representative types of Chinese diplomatic discourse. Consequently, the study's findings may not fully capture the complexities and nuances of the broader domain of Chinese diplomatic communication. Furthermore, the evaluation process relies solely on a single evaluator, which may introduce subjectivity and limit the comprehensiveness of the analysis.

Future research endeavors may benefit from incorporating more representative examples of Chinese diplomatic discourse, such as the concepts of the "Community of Shared Future for Mankind" and the "Belt and Road Initiative." By examining a broader range of text types, including policy documents, speeches by leaders, and white papers, the universality and applicability of the research findings can be enhanced.

In addition, refining the assessment dimensions and introducing a multi-party evaluation framework could provide a more comprehensive understanding of translation quality. This approach would involve integrating evaluations from professional translators, international audiences, political scholars, and other relevant stakeholders. Such a multi-faceted evaluation process would allow for a more balanced consideration of both the accuracy of the translations and their effectiveness in cross-cultural communication.

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