



# Nominalization Translation Shift Strategies in External Publicity Texts from a Functional Perspective: A Case Study of the Ideological and Political Wisdom Edition of *New Horizons College English* (4<sup>th</sup> Edition)

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## Abstract

External publicity texts are directed at international audiences and are intrinsically linked to national image and identity; consequently, their language requires acceptability, intelligibility, and disseminability. The Chinese-to-English translation exercises on current affairs in the *New Horizons College English* (4<sup>th</sup> Edition, Ideological and Political Wisdom Edition) are predominantly external publicity texts. The translated texts in this textbook exhibit a vivid and concise style with rich and diverse nominalization expressions. Based on the transitivity analysis of grammatical metaphor in functional linguistics, this paper interprets the basic patterns of nominalization translation shifts from Chinese to English. Furthermore, it explores the strategic application of nominalization translation in the English translation of external publicity documents, offering implications for translation teaching and practice.

**Keywords:** External publicity texts; Nominalization; Transitivity analysis; Translation shift; Communication.

## 1. Introduction

In recent years, the application of linguistic theories to translation studies has been gaining momentum, particularly regarding the utilization of functional linguistics. Applying the theory of "Grammatical Metaphor" within Systemic Functional Grammar, this paper attempts to interpret the nominalization translation shift strategies found in the Chinese-to-English translations within the *New Horizons College English* (Reading and Writing, 4<sup>th</sup> Edition, Ideological and Political Wisdom Edition, 2023). Nominalization structures act as significant linguistic resources that cannot be ignored during the translator's reconstruction and construal (Tang, 2016). Research on nominalization and its translation from a functional linguistic perspective has primarily focused on scientific and technical texts (Guo, 2010; Yang, 2013; Ding, 2023), political texts (Han & Zhao, 2016; Tang, 2016, 2018, 2022), legal texts (Wang, 2018, 2020), and external publicity texts (Hu & Li, 2025).

Nominalization is a grammatical metaphor technique for the reconstrual of experience. According to Tang (2018), the concept of nominalization from the perspective of Systemic Functional Linguistics is defined as: "A lexicogrammatical means of reconstruing process meanings, attribute meanings, circumstantial elements, and relational elements as 'things'. The process of reconstrual manifests as semantic junction at the semantic level and as rank shift or class shift at the lexicogrammatical level, ultimately transforming into nouns or nominal groups." Nominalization is a typical metaphorical expression; nominalization translation shifts are the fundamental pathway for achieving explicitation, simplification, and normalization in translated texts.

## 2. Transitivity Analysis and Translation

Transitivity analysis in functional grammar views a sentence containing subject and predicate components as a clause. A clause represents a process, which consists of a process verb, participants, and circumstances. Transitivity analysis categorizes clauses into six process types: material process, mental process, verbal process, relational process, behavioral process, and existential process. The transformation between these processes is termed metaphor (Wang, 2018). The predicate verbs corresponding to these six processes are: doing, sensing, behaving, saying, being, and existing (cited in Wang, 2020).

In Systemic Functional Linguistics, the fixed correspondence between semantics and grammar is termed the 'congruent form'. The phenomenon where semantics and grammar do not correspond is grammatical metaphor, known as the 'incongruent form' or 'metaphorical form'. This incongruent grammatical metaphor can enhance the meaning potential of language (Halliday, 2004, pp. 7–23). In translation, to ensure the target text better conforms to the thinking habits and stylistic characteristics of the target language, metaphorical forms are often adopted to replace congruent forms, including the transformation of one process into another. Functional linguistics regards nominalization as a type of grammatical metaphor, achieving a reconstrual of experience by altering the congruent matching of experiential meaning with lexicogrammar.

This study takes the English translation texts from the Chinese-to-English exercises across all four volumes (24 units) of the *New Horizons College English* (4th Edition, Ideological and Political Wisdom Edition) as the object of study to analyze nominalization translation shift strategies. Specifically referencing Tang's (2022) model of Chinese-to-English nominalization translation shifts (see Table 1), this paper analyzes rank shift or class shift phenomena occurring at the lexicogrammatical level during the translation process.

**Table 1: Nominalization Translation Shift Model**

Type		Source Language Expression	Rank Shift	Target Language Expression
Translation Shift	Metaphorization	Other Word Classes	Same Level (→)	Nominalization
		Zero	Upgrading (↗)	Nominalization
		Clause (Complex)	Downgrading (↘)	Nominalization
	De-metaphorization	Nominalization	Same Level (→)	Other Word Classes
		Nominalization	Upgrading (↗)	Clause (Complex)
		Nominalization	Downgrading (↘)	Zero

(Nominalization Translation Shift Model, adapted from Tang, 2022)

### 3. Types of Nominalization Translation Shift Strategies in External Publicity Text Translation

Interlingual translation triggers a reconstrual of meaning, possessing two reciprocal directions simultaneously: one is 'metaphorization', which increases the degree of metaphor by transforming the source language's congruent form into the target language's metaphorical form; the other is 'de-metaphorization', which reduces the degree of metaphor by transforming the source language's metaphorical form into the target language's congruent form. At the lexicogrammatical level, shifts in both directions are realized through class shift or rank shift.

#### 3.1 Metaphorization Shift

Referencing Hu (1996), the process of "metaphorization" is indicated by "→". Metaphorization translation specifically includes three methods: 1) Same-level metaphorization (Other phrases → Nominalized phrases); 2) Upgrading metaphorization (Word/Zero ↗ Nominalized phrases); 3) Downgrading metaphorization (Clause ↘ Nominalized phrases).

##### 3.1.1 Same-level Metaphorization

Reconstruing process and attribute meanings—construed by congruent forms in the source text—as 'things' in the target text is a conscious choice made by the translator to construct the target discourse.

In Example [1a], the source process verb *collect* (收录) is translated as *is a collection of*, becoming an identifying process. Nominalization possesses the interpersonal function of expressing authority and objectification; the negotiability embodied by the original process is transformed into authoritative and objective information through nominalization.

Example [1b] adopts a "generic English weak verb + nominalization" structure for the source verb. The propositional meaning remains unchanged, and even the sentence structure and transitivity align with the original. However, the translator's choice of nominalization imbues the style with features more characteristic of written language.

In Example [1c], the English translation utilizes the preposition "for" to downgrade the object component "respect, care, and support for the elderly" (originally acting as a predicate-object phrase in the source text) into a noun phrase, successfully simplifying the target sentence structure.

#### [1] Verb Phrase → Nominalized Phrase

a. 《论语》收录了孔子的思想。

The Analects is a collection of the thoughts of Confucius.

b. 通过社会实践活动，他们更深入地了解社会，增强社会责任感。

Through social practice, they can gain a deeper understanding of society.

c. 孝道指子女对父母应尽的义务，主要包括尊敬、关爱及赡养老人。

Generally speaking, filial piety refers to children's obligations to their parents, mainly including respect, care, and support for the elderly.

Example [2a] extracts the shared morpheme "ke" (meaning 'able to be' or 'worthy of') from three Chinese adjectives and translates it as the *worthy of* structure. This metaphorically transforms three adjectives embodying qualities into three parallel nouns in the translation, serving as objects of the preposition *of*. This aligns with the structural characteristic of English as a right-branching language.

In [2b], the source text uses "growing day by day" (日益增多) as an adjective phrase acting as a predicate to describe the state or trend of the subject. This fits the characteristic of Chinese as a "non-balanced language" (unbalanced toward the topic). A congruent translation might read: *Chinese and Abroad visitors to the Old Town of Lijiang is growing*. However, the subject is evidently too long, violating the "balanced language" characteristic of English (Wu, 2011, p. 127). English is a stress-timed language that values rhythm; a sentence with a lengthy opening that delays the predicate verb results in a dragging rhythm and blurred focus. The translation shifts the subject, converting the original circumstantial element "Old Town of Lijiang" into the carrier of an attributive process, while the original carrier "visitors" is converted into an attribute component. This is a typical grammatical metaphor phenomenon, achieving syntactic balance in the translation. Textually, it also maintains subject consistency across three long sentences within the source paragraph.

#### [2] Adjective Phrase → Nominalized Phrase

a. 展现可信、可爱、可敬的中国形象。

present China as a country worthy of friendship, trust, and respect.

b. 到丽江古城观光游览的中外游客日益增多。

The old town of Lijiang is receiving a growing number of tourists from home and abroad.

Compared with the studies of Tang (2016, 2018, 2022), the nominalization of adverbs appears as a relatively rare phenomenon in our research subjects. In Example [3a], the translation converts the adverbial phrase "in policy" (在政策上) into the noun "policy", shifting from a circumstantial element in the source sentence to a constituent part of the goal in the target sentence, making the text more concise. In Example [3b], the congruent translation of "comprehensively" (全面) would be *comprehensively*. However, the translation selects the prepositional phrase "on all fronts" which contains nominalization, highlighting the importance of the circumstantial element within the clause.

#### [3] Adverb Phrase → Nominalized Phrase

a. 从而实现城乡在政策上平等。

so that the urban and rural areas will achieve policy equality.

b. 全面推进中华民族伟大复兴。

to advance national rejuvenation on all fronts.

#### [4] Chinese Verbal-Noun Phrase → Nominalized Phrase

Chinese possesses a special category of vocabulary that holds dual grammatical attributes of both verbs and nouns. These words retain action meaning while embodying characteristics of 'things' within syntactic structures, a phenomenon of class flexibility known as verbal nouns. In Examples [4a] and [4b], verbal noun phrases appear; their English translations utilize derivational means to alter the part of speech, reflecting the differences in lexicalization between the Chinese and English language systems.

a. 中国书法的形成、发展与汉字的演变存在着密不可分的关系。

The formation and development of Chinese calligraphy are closely related to the evolution of Chinese characters.

b. 在其一千多年的历史中，水墨画经历了不断的发展、提高和完善。

In its history of over one thousand years, ink wash painting has experienced constant development, improvement, and perfection.

Another characteristic of Chinese is that verb structures can serve as subjects, objects, or attributives modifying nouns without the use of conjunctions or other cohesive devices (Hu, 2025). English translation often opts to translate verbs in attributive positions into English nominalizations, forming pre-modifiers (Tang, 2018). Example [5a] discards the congruent post-modifier relative clause translation, transforming the source verb structure "go to sea" (出海) into the object "crew" within a prepositional phrase, simplifying the text. Example [5b] translates the source verb structure "fitness" (健身) into the noun modifier "fitness", allowing for the parallel translation of the first two clauses and simplifying the text.

#### [5] Verbs in Attributive Positions → Nominalized Phrase

a. 郑和带领船队七下西洋，出海的人员共计 10 多万人，访问了 30 多个国家和地区。

Zheng He led his fleet to make seven voyages to the Western Seas with over 100,000 crew members in total, and they visited more than 30 countries and regions.

b. 太极拳是一种武术，也是一种健身运动，在中国有着悠久的历史。

Taijiquan is a martial art and a fitness exercise as well. It has a long history in China.

Prepositions in Chinese can also be translated metaphorically into English nominalizations. For instance, the circumstantial element "every year" (每年) in Example [6a] is translated as *on an annual basis* rather than the congruent *per year*. The circumstantial element "through" (通过) in Example [6b] is translated as *by way of* rather than the congruent preposition *through*. Prepositional phrases containing nominalization increase the stability of circumstantial elements while highlighting their importance in the clause (Tang, 2018).

#### [6] Preposition → Nominalized Phrase

a. 论坛每年定期在博鳌举行会议，

BFA holds conferences in Boao on an annual basis,

b. 孔子主张，应该通过自身修养把中庸思想融入日常行为之中。

Confucius advocated that the Doctrine of the Mean should be integrated into one's daily conduct by way of self-cultivation.

Demonstrative pronouns are often translated into English nominalizations to avoid ambiguity. In Example [7], two pronouns appear successively referring to different objects. The first pronoun "zhi" (之) uses the congruent pronoun translation "which" to introduce an appositive clause. The second pronoun "qi" (其), however, is not translated as "which" again but is restored to *the Chinese Dream*. This creates lexical repetition and cohesion with the preceding text. Furthermore, as "qi" begins a new sentence, restoring the subject highlights the identified concept. This nominalization makes the logical relationship of the context explicit.

#### [7] Pronoun → Nominalized Phrase

实现中华民族伟大复兴是近代以来中国人民最伟大的梦想，我们称之为"中国梦"，其基本内涵是实现国家富强、民族振兴、人民幸福。

Realizing national rejuvenation, which we define as the Chinese Dream, has been the greatest Chinese expectation since modern times. In essence, the Chinese Dream is a commitment to bringing prosperity and happiness to the country, the nation, and the people.

### 3.1.2 Upgrading Metaphorization

Nominalization in the translation sometimes has no direct correspondence in the source text. Added nominalizations typically reflect the translator's contextual supplementation and pragmatic enrichment to conform to target language collocation habits. The added nominalizations in Examples [8a] and [8b] supplement information based on the source context, either restoring the true patient—i.e., "(the ability) to improve the quality of talent cultivation"—or filling in informational gaps, such as "establishing discourse power (in international affairs)".

#### [8] Zero ↗ Nominalized Phrase

a. 全面提高人才自主培养质量。

comprehensively improve our ability to nurture talent at home.

b. 形成国际话语权。

establish China's voice in international affairs.

### 3.1.3 Downgrading Metaphorization

Downgrading a clause to a nominal group allows compressed propositional information to become given information, serving as the subject of the subsequent clause. Example [9a] exhibits a phenomenon specific to Chinese: the clause "movements are slow and gentle" serves as the predicate. The translation downgrades this to a prepositional phrase acting as a concomitant adverbial, becoming a circumstantial element in the translated sentence modifying the main clause. In Example [9b], the translation downgrades two independent clauses from the source text into two noun phrases, which then serve as the subject of the next clause; their attributes are transformed from goal components into actors in the translation. Both translated sentences in [9a] and [9b] result in more compact structures, avoiding excessive clauses and clearly distinguishing primary from secondary information.

#### [9] Clause $\searrow$ Nominalized Phrase

a. 太极拳动作缓慢而柔和, 适合任何年龄、性别、体型的人。

With slow and gentle movement, Taijiquan is suitable for anyone, whatever their age, gender, or build.

b. 不断改善人民群众的生活条件, 让他们得到更多实惠, 将促进国民幸福指数不但提升。

The constant improvement in people's living conditions and the provision of more benefits will push a continuous rise in the GNH Index.

## 3.2 De-metaphorization Shift

De-metaphorization shift occurs when the translator 'unpacks' information packaged by nominalization in the source sentence. The translator's reconstrual restores abstract 'things' to processes or attributes, reducing the metaphorical degree of the source text. De-metaphorization translation also includes three specific methods: 1) Same-level de-metaphorization (Nominalized phrase  $\rightarrow$  Other phrase); 2) Upgrading de-metaphorization (Nominalized phrase  $\nearrow$  Clause); 3) Downgrading de-metaphorization (Nominalized phrase  $\searrow$  Word/Zero) (Tang, 2022).

### 3.2.1 Same-level De-metaphorization

In Chinese, the structure "Quasi-predicate-object verb (carry out, make, etc.) + Disyllabic verb (nominalized or reified)" and the "NP's VP/AP" structure contain nominalized verbs that are often de-metaphorized in English translation, reverting to congruent verbs or adjectives, though shifts to common nouns also occur.

Formal Chinese registers rely heavily on nominalization structures, frequently realized through implicit, paratactic nominalization via "Quasi-predicate-object verbs + Disyllabic verbs". Chinese quasi-predicate-object verbs function to 'reify' actions. A common English translation strategy is to 'unpack' this nominalized verb into an English verb. For instance, in Example [10a], "make a contribution" reifies the action "contribute", a grammatical metaphor. A translation retaining this metaphor would be *make proactive contribution to*; however, the textbook translation chooses to 'unpack' it into the congruent form, directly restoring the substantial verb *contribute actively*, thereby strengthening the tone.

The "NP's VP/AP" structure in Chinese (e.g., *the publication of this book*) is a grammatical tool for 'reifying' actions, behaviors, or states. By combining a logical subject and a predicate component via "de" (of), it forms a referable whole acting as a nominal component (subject, object), representing a primary means of nominalization (reification) at the syntactic level in Chinese. In Chinese-to-English translation, it is common to 'unpack' and restore the predicate attribute of the VP. In Example [10b], nominalizations appear in "NP's VP" structures ("Chinese people's valuing", "international community's attention"). The translation employs de-metaphorization, unpacking the "VP" to restore the original function of *value* and *attention* as predicates (*be valued by*, *are attracting*). Converting entities back into actions through this method shifts expression from abstract to concrete and provides positive emphasis.

#### [10] Nominalized Phrase $\rightarrow$ Verb Phrase

a. 在新的历史时期, 博鳌亚洲论坛将继续为亚洲及世界和平、繁荣与可持续发展做出积极贡献。

BFA will continue to **contribute actively** to the peace, prosperity, and sustainable development of Asia and the world.

b. 如今孔子的学说不仅受到中国人的重视, 也越来越得到整个国际社会的关注。

Nowadays, the teachings of Confucius are not only **valued** by the Chinese people, but are also **attracting** increasing attention from the international community.

Example [11] illustrates de-metaphorization where nominalization is restored to an adjective phrase, altering the construal of semantic elements and the transitivity of the entire clause. In [11a], the nominalization "love/popularity" (喜爱) is a participant in a material process in the source clause. The translation restores it to the attribute *popular* in a relational process (*become*). In [11b], the translation restores "effectiveness/efficacy" (效能) to the adjective *effective*,



converting the source material process into an attribute of the relational process *make*. Both translations highlight evaluative attributes.

#### [11] Nominalized Phrase → Adjective Phrase

a. 因而深受中国人民和世界人民的喜爱。

Therefore, it has become very **popular** among people both in China and around the world.

b. 全面提升国际传播效能。

Strive to make our communications more **effective**.

For lexical metaphors in Chinese source sentences, English translations typically use common nouns for interpretation. For example, in [12a], "gold and silver mountains" (金山银山) is a four-character conceptual metaphor with distinct Chinese cultural characteristics. As it is difficult to find an equivalent idiom in English, the translation adopts the common noun phrase *invaluable assets*, which is concise and clear. For hyperbole that may not be readily accepted by Western audiences, translation often selects plainer common nouns to facilitate reception. Example [12b] compares "Zheng He's voyages" to a "feat" or "magnificent act" (壮举). Rather than a literal *epic* or *feat*, the translation selects the common noun *a great achievement*. Both examples reflect an audience-centered approach in terms of linguistic style and thinking habits (Li, 2012).

#### [12] Nominalized Phrase → Common Noun Phrase

a. 绿水青山就是金山银山。

Lucid waters and lush mountains are **invaluable assets**.

b. 郑和下（v）西洋是世界航海史上的壮举。

Zheng He's voyages (n) to the Western Seas were **a great achievement** in the world's navigation history.

The process meaning unpacked by de-metaphorization can also be realized through non-finite verb forms. In Examples [13a-b], "construction" (建设), "planning" (规划), and "realization" (实现) are translated into gerund structures. These have weak verbal properties but imply process meaning (Tang, 2018).

#### [13] Nominalized Phrase → Non-finite Verb

a. 不断推动空间站建设。

Continuously advancing the **building** of its space station.

b. 其目的是通过对城乡发展进行统筹规划。

It aims to eliminate the urban-rural dual economic structure through **integrated planning** for urban and rural development.

c. 其基本内涵是实现国家富强、民族振兴、人民幸福。

In essence, the Chinese Dream is a commitment to **bringing** prosperity and happiness to the country, the nation, and the people.

### 3.2.2 Upgrading De-metaphorization

When a concept expressed by Chinese nominalization lacks a lexical equivalent in English, the translator may upgrade and de-metaphorize it into a phrase or clause for paraphrase. In Example [14a], the four-character idiom "hard to tune for all tastes" (众口难调) is difficult to match with a corresponding English phrase. The translation chooses to restore it to a clause for explanation. Example [14b] transforms the abstract concept "sustenance/emotional anchor" (寄托) into the common noun *event*, then adds a relative clause to 'unpack' the concept. Example [14c] uses the clause *where they should be headed* to unpack the abstract concept "direction". All three examples transform abstract concepts from the source text into concrete material processes; once the concept of 'thing' is de-metaphorized, the meaning becomes explicit.

#### [14] Nominalized Phrase ↗ Clause

a. 虽然众口难调，但必须承认的是，“春晚”已成为一项“新民俗”。

Although it's **hard to satisfy everyone's taste**, it should be admitted that the Spring Festival Gala has become a "new folk custom".

b. 它不仅是一台晚会，更是一种仪式和象征，一种文化与标签，一种情感与寄托。

It is more than a gala; it is a ritual and a symbol, a culture and a label, and an emotion and **an event which people** entrust their hearts to.

c. 明确未来努力的方向。

gain a clear idea about where they should be headed in the future.

### 3.2.3 Downgrading De-metaphorization

Lexical redundancy is one of the main issues preventing Chinese political text translations from aligning with the thinking habits of foreign audiences. The most common redundant words in 'Chinglish' are category nouns (Wu, 2010). Downgrading de-metaphorization primarily involves the omission of these Chinese category nouns. Examples [15a-d] all demonstrate the omission of such category words.

#### [15] Nominalized Phrase ↘ Zero

a. 社会发展和就业**形势**的变化

the social development and **changes in employment**

b. 通过社会实践**活动**

Through **social practice**

c. 中国的教育**事业**得到了快速发展。

China's education **has developed** rapidly.

d. 站在人与自然和谐共生的**高度**谋划发展。

...and remember to maintain the harmony between humanity and nature when planning our development.

Examples [16] and [17] present another form of nominalization omission: merging multiple repetitive or synonymous nominalized expressions into a single translation. In English expression, synonymous repetition is generally avoided; placing two synonyms or words with similar meanings together is considered redundant information, which the translator should decisively eliminate (Zeng & Chen, 2018). The repetition and synonymy in Examples [16] and [17] enhance the rhythm and cadence of the Chinese text, but translating them all into English nominalizations would result in 'noun bloat'. Therefore, merged translation is employed. In Example [17a], the Chinese terms for "prosperity" (富强) and "revitalization" (振兴) are both translated as *Prosperity*, merging them directly.

#### [16] Repetitive Nominalization ↘ Zero

a. 这将为互联网经济的**发展**提供更多**发展**机遇和更广阔的**发展**空间。

This will create more opportunities and broader prospects for the development of the Internet economy.

b. 建设**学习型**社会、**学习型**大国。

build a society and country of learning.

#### [17] Synonymous Nominalization ↘ Zero

a. 实现国家**富强**、民族**振兴**、人民幸福。

**Prosperity** and happiness to the country, the nation, and the people.

b. 为党育人、为国育才

cultivate **talent** for the Party and the country

c. 强**身健体**

building one's **body**

Choice implies meaning; different wording leads to different meanings (Halliday, 1999, pp. 15–36). Huang (2004) proposed the famous "Three Closenesses" principle for external publicity translation: close to the reality of China's development, close to the needs of foreign audiences for information about China, and close to the thinking habits of foreign audiences. Overall, the above corpus analysis indicates that nominalization translation shift strategies—specifically through upgrading, downgrading, addition, omission, and part-of-speech conversion—alter the construal and construction of source sentences. This aligns with the thinking habits of foreign audiences and achieves optimal communication effects.

## 4. Conclusion

The process of Chinese-to-English translation involves not only an accurate understanding and grasp of the mother tongue (Chinese) but, more importantly, the ability to select highly readable language to accurately and completely present the connotations of the Chinese text (Han, 2015, p. 4). Taking the external publicity Chinese-to-English translation exercises from all four volumes (24 units) of the *New Horizons College English* (4th Edition, Ideological and Political Wisdom Edition) as examples, this paper has interpreted the application of nominalization translation shift strategies. This analysis contributes to enhancing university students' translation appreciation and transformational application abilities.

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