

# Optimizing Bilingual Sports Commentary under the Guidance of Functional Equivalence Approach

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**Abstract:** *This paper explores the application of functional equivalence theory in enhancing bilingual sports commentary, with a focus on Chinese and English languages. By analyzing commentary from various sports events, including the F1 British Grand Prix, NBA games, FIFA World Cup matches, and League of Legends World Championships, the study identifies key differences and areas for improvement in both language commentaries. Chinese commentary often suffers from clarity issues due to excessive commentators and informal language, while English commentary lacks cultural and idiomatic richness. The research demonstrates that integrating functional equivalence theory can significantly improve the quality of sports commentary by ensuring that it is culturally and linguistically tailored to the audience's experience. This approach not only provides a richer viewer experience but also bridges the gap between different linguistic audiences, maintaining the excitement and context of the sports event.*

**Keywords:** Functional Equivalence Theory; Bilingual sports commentary; Chinese and English commentary; Sports broadcasting.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The dynamic world of sports broadcasting, where the excitement of the game is encapsulated through the commentator's words, presents unique challenges and opportunities for bilingual commentary. This paper delves into the application of Eugene Nida's functional equivalence theory in optimizing sports commentary across Chinese and English languages. By examining various high-stakes sports events, this study identifies and compares the effectiveness, challenges, and cultural nuances of commentary in both languages. It argues that a functionally equivalent approach can enhance the narrative's quality, making it more engaging and culturally resonant for diverse audiences. Through a detailed comparative analysis, this paper aims to provide insights into how functional equivalence can be a valuable tool in the hands of sports commentators, ensuring that the thrill and passion of the sport are effectively conveyed to all viewers, regardless of language.

## 2. PRINCIPLES OF FUNCTIONAL EQUIVALENCE IN TRANSLATION

The theory of functional equivalence, proposed by the American translation scholar Eugene Nida, advocates achieving the same effect between the source and target languages in the translation process. Nida points out that "A translation of dynamic equivalence aims at complete naturalness of expression, and tries to relate the receptor to modes of behavior relevant within the context of his own culture" (Nida, 2004:159). Therefore, translation is not merely a literal rendering of text but involves conveying the same information and feelings, ensuring that readers of the target language can experience similar emotional and cognitive responses as those of the source language. This equivalence refers not only to a direct correspondence of language and text but also to a deeper level of functional and semantic transfer, emphasizing that translation should maintain the original's effect and function across different cultural and linguistic contexts. Tan Zaixi also believes that under the guidance of the functional equivalence theory, the translator must produce a translation that can fulfill a communicative function similar to the original. Under the premise of accurate information transmission, the translation should be readable to facilitate understanding and acceptance by the readers (Tan Zaixi, 1999: XVIII).

## 3. THE ART AND SCIENCE OF SPORTS COMMENTARY

In television sports broadcasting, the commentary plays a crucial role in conveying the essence of the game and enhancing the viewer's experience. Experts like Li Qiang, Lin Lin, and Guo Xiaochun have revealed that commentary is not merely a simple narration of live events, but a complex entity that integrates professional knowledge, artistry, and communicative skills. It demands commentators possess a professional level of cognitive

ability to introduce the game accurately and vividly, and also requires an artistic sense and emotional engagement, using expressive language skills to enhance the game's appeal and infectiousness.

The professionalization of sports commentary requires that commentators not only master the rules and technical tactics of the game but also have a deep understanding of the historical background, technical characteristics, and tactical arrangements of the competing teams. This in-depth analysis provides the audience with a multi-dimensional understanding of the game, helping them to fully experience every moment. Moreover, the artistry of commentary is reflected in how these professional analyses are transformed into engaging narratives, allowing the audience to experience the passion and tension of the game, even in front of a screen. In summary, television sports commentary is a complex text that, through professional analysis of the game, artistic linguistic expression, and profound cultural interpretation, enriches people's cultural lives and enhances the media's communicative effect while broadcasting sports, thus occupying an irreplaceable position in modern sports communication.

#### 4. CASE ANALYSIS

In this chapter, the author will present four examples from different sports events, starting with an introduction to the competition scene, followed by a comparative analysis of the commentary in both Chinese and English. Then, drawing on the characteristics of the commentary and the theory of functional equivalence in translation, the author will provide revised bilingual commentaries, aiming to enhance the quality of the bilingual commentary.

The abbreviations used in this chapter are as follows: CSI: Competition Scene Introduction; EC: English Commentary; CC: Chinese Commentary; REC: Refined English Commentary; RCC: Refined Chinese Commentary; CA: Comparative Analysis.

##### Example 1:

CSI:

On July 3, 2022, during the 2022 F1 British Grand Prix held in Silverstone, UK, the race was in its 45th lap when Ferrari's driver, Leclerc, in second/third place, and Red Bull's driver, Perez, were contending for the second position. After a series of competitions, Mercedes' driver Hamilton, who was in fourth place, seized the opportunity to overtake the two cars in front of him, executing a spectacular move to claim the second position.



Figure 1: Hamilton was trailing behind Leclerc and Perez



Figure 2: Leclerc and Perez's wheel to wheel fight

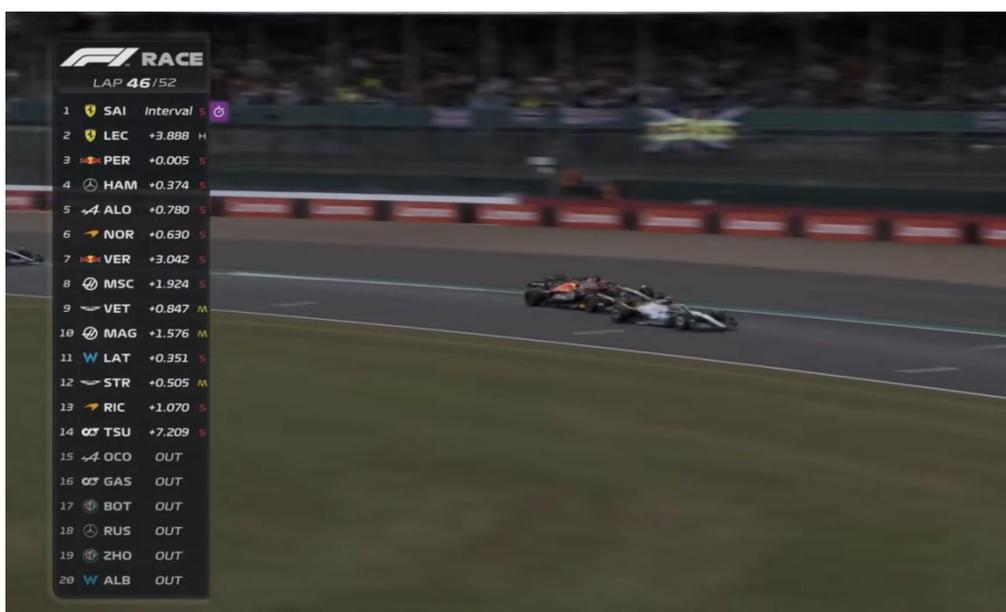


Figure 3: Hamilton capitalized on the opportunity to brilliantly overtake both

EC:

Commentator 1: He will get the slipstream, and he's got the DRS. We saw the rear wing open. This is going to be very close into Stowe Corner. Commentator 2: Yeah, Perez is catching Charles Leclerc. He tricks him towards the inside. Perez on the inside. Charles Leclerc gives him just enough space. Can Perez squeeze past the guy wheel-to-wheel? Leclerc has that inside line. Perez goes off the track. Cuts the chicane. Off goes Leclerc. Through goes Hamilton. Unbelievable stuff. Coming out of the final corner. Perez and Leclerc going for it. Hamilton says thank you very much. Another thing opens up for him.

CC:

Commentator 1: 来了, DRS打开了。

Commentator 2: 啊呀, 外线。内线, 没有问题, 啊, 挤出去了。

Commentator 1: 两辆车在重刹区还可以拼一下, 勒克莱尔可以把佩雷兹退出去。

Commentator 2: 好的, 勒克莱尔太棒了。

Commentator 3: 哇, 汉密尔顿渔翁得利, 主场疯狂了。

Commentator 1: 真的是一次让人目瞪口呆的缠斗啊。

CA:

Firstly, in the English commentary, the division of labor between the two commentators is clearly defined. When the second commentator starts describing the scene, the first one remains silent, allowing the audience to clearly understand the situation on the field through the commentary. However, in the Chinese commentary, the division of labor among the three commentators is not clear and is quite chaotic, making it difficult for the audience (especially those who do not understand the game) to have a clear understanding of the details of the race. Secondly, the English commentary provides a very clear description of the details of the spectacular overtaking, narrating every phase of the event distinctly, with coherent transitions in the commentary. The audience can understand the situation on the field even without watching the screen. In contrast, the Chinese commentary is filled with numerous modal particles, which significantly detracts from the viewer's experience, forcing them to rely on the visual broadcast to comprehend the on-field situation and dynamics. Finally, in the Chinese commentary, the third commentator concludes the overtaking event with the idiomatic expression "fishing in troubled waters," enhancing the audience's perception of the spectacular overtaking and adding to the viewing experience. This element could be incorporated into the English commentary to enhance it.

REC:

Commentator 1: He will get the slipstream, and he's got the DRS. We saw the rear wing open. This is going to be very close into Stowe Corner.

Commentator 2: Yeah, Perez is catching Charles Leclerc. He tricks him towards the inside. Perez on the inside. Charles Leclerc gives him just enough space. Can Perez squeeze past the guy wheel-to-wheel? Leclerc has that inside line. Perez goes off the track. Cuts the chicane. Off goes Leclerc. Through goes Hamilton. Unbelievable stuff. Coming out of the final corner. Perez and Leclerc going for it. Hamilton says thank you very much. Another thing opens up for him.

Commentator 1: It was an unparalleled overtaking, with Ferrari and Red Bull fighting for a bone and Mercedes runs away with it.

To enhance the English-speaking audience's experience of the race, the adapted English idiom "When two dogs fight for a bone, a third runs away with it" was added to highlight the excitement of the overtaking moment.

RCC:

Commentator 1: 佩雷兹紧贴在勒克莱尔后面吃到了尾流, 打开了DRS。

Commentator 2: 佩雷兹紧贴在勒克莱尔身后, 在内线晃动骗取身位超车, 佩雷兹挤进来了! 勒克莱尔在规则允许的范围内留够了空间! 这次佩雷斯在轮对轮对决中能否成功超越呢? 还是不行! 勒克莱尔占住了内线, 佩雷兹被挤出了赛道! 到了下个急转弯, 勒克莱尔被挤到了草地上! 汉密尔顿, 奔驰车队的汉密尔顿从后面杀了出来, 一次难以置信的一超二!

Commentator 3: 在最后的几个弯道, 三位车手上演了精彩的缠斗, 法拉利和红牛鹬蚌相争, 奔驰渔翁得利。汉密尔顿利用技巧完成了又一次精彩的超越。

Following the modification, the commentary allocation among the three commentators was reorganized, improving the audience's viewing experience. Additionally, extensive details of the overtaking maneuver were incorporated to clarify the rapid shifts in the race situation for the audience. Lastly, the summary integrated a Chinese proverb with the on-field situation, further deepening the audience's engagement with the race. This approach ensured that audiences of both languages received a comparable viewing experience.

**Example 2:**

CSI:

On February 28, 2016, the Golden State Warriors faced off against the Oklahoma City Thunder in an away game. The match was intensely contested, with no winner decided in regular time, leading to the first overtime. Russell Westbrook of the Thunder missed a mid-range shot, and the teams were tied at 118 points. With just 0.6 seconds left in the game, Warriors' star Stephen Curry hit a long-range three-pointer to secure a dramatic victory. Curry scored 12 three-pointers in the game, tying the then-NBA record for most three-pointers in a single game.



Figure 4: Westbrook misses the mid-range shot



Figure 5: Curry attempts a half-court three-pointer



Figure 6: Curry achieves the game-winner

EC:

Commentator: Shot clock at seven. Westbrook on the drive, falling away! Won't go. Rebound taken by Iguodala. They do have a timeout. Decide not to use it. Curry! Way downtown! Bang! Bang! Oh, what a shot from Curry!

With 6 tenths of a second remaining! The brilliant shooting of Steph of Curry continues! And he ties the NBA record with his 12th three-pointer of the game!

CC:

Commentator 1: 7秒钟, 7秒钟, 威少突左手, 难啊!

Commentator 2: 篮板被勇士拿到了, 5秒钟。

Commentator 3: 5..4..3..

Commentator 1&2&3: 库里! 啊啊啊——!

Commentator 1: 库里超远距离三分球!

Commentator 2: 离三分线, 我去! 天呐!

Commentator 1: 这是我的职业生涯中看到的最牛逼的绝杀!

Commentator 3: 太不讲道理了。

CA:

The English commentary covered the details of the game, used appropriate interjections, and highlighted Curry's record-tying performance in three-pointers. However, in the Chinese commentary, the first issue was the confusion caused by the number of commentators, leading to a chaotic listening experience. Moreover, the three commentators lacked detailed description of the game's nuances, such as the number of timeouts available to the Warriors. Additionally, in the heat of the moment, the commentators used inappropriate language, which does not meet the standards of sports commentary. The commentary should conclude with Curry's outstanding performance and inform the fans about his record-equalling feat.

REC:

Since the English commentary already provides a satisfactory visual and auditory experience, no changes are necessary there. The focus will be on revising the Chinese commentary.

RCC:

Commentator 1: 加时赛还剩7秒钟, 雷霆队球权, 威斯布鲁克突破, 漂移干拔中投, 没进!

Commentator 2: 伊戈达拉拿下篮板, 传给库里, 勇士队还有个暂停但是选择不叫。库里! 刚过半场, 直接出手三分! 命中!!

Commentator 3: 库里! 杀死比赛的一球! 只给雷霆队留下了0.6秒的时间!

Commentator 1: 会挽雕弓如满月, 西北望, 射天狼。史蒂芬·库里, 太厉害了!

Commentator 2: 库里这场比赛同时还追平了NBA单场三分球命中数的纪录!

In the revised commentary, the roles of the commentators were more clearly defined to improve clarity. Additional details of the game were included to convey the urgency and tension of the match. Finally, a Chinese poem was added, vividly depicting an archer drawing the bow fully, symbolizing the shooter's ambition and exceptional skill. This effectively illustrated Curry's remarkable performance in the game, offering Chinese viewers a more profound experience and leaving a lasting impression when combined with the game footage.

### Example 3:

SCI:

On June 16, 2018, during the FIFA World Cup in Russia, a critical Group B match between Spain and Portugal unfolded, significantly impacting the progression to the knockout stages. The game was a rollercoaster, with both

teams delivering exceptional performances. In the final moments, Portugal, trailing 2-3 against Spain, was awarded a valuable free kick in the 86th minute. Portuguese star Cristiano Ronaldo took the kick, scoring directly and leveling the match at 3-3, securing a crucial point.



**Figure 7:** Ronaldo takes the free kick



**Figure 8:** The ball hits the top corner



**Figure 9:** Ronaldo celebrates with teammates

EC:

Commentator: As so often, Portugal's hopes rest on Cristiano Ronaldo's shoulders. Referee trying to get the wall back the required distance. Cristiano Ronaldo. Oh, genius! Absolute genius! Look at De gea's position. He's not gonna get that, is he? Up. Over the wall. Down. Under the crossbar. Exemplary, perfection, and it's all square in Sochi, and it's a hat-trick for Cristiano Ronaldo. Ah, the Spanish heart's been broken right at the end. It's his sixth hat-trick for Portugal, his 51st in his career, and it's the 51st hat-trick at a World Cup Finals.

CC:

Commentator 1: C罗在丈量着距离,把自己大腿上的肌肉向世人展现了出来。目光中透漏着一丝坚定,也透露着一丝凶狠。

Commentator 2: C罗射门,漂亮!球进了!87分钟,C罗帽子戏法!翩若惊鸿,宛若游龙。C罗上演了帽子戏法,他用一记任意球在空中写了一个C字,这是属于C罗的标志。难以置信,这场比赛太精彩了。

Commentator 1: 这是一个经典的伊比利亚半岛的德比啊,这个球绕过了人墙迅速的下坠,C罗典型的电梯球,打的德赫亚是目瞪口呆啊。

Commentator 2: 布斯克斯和皮克两个人已经尽全力去起跳,但是这两个人的起跳就像是C罗打出的这记任意球的制高点的测量尺一样。擦着他们的头发,他们的发梢飞了过去。

Commentator 1: 索契的这个夜晚还是属于C罗的。

CA:

In the English commentary, the goal was detailed, and Ronaldo's performance was praised. The reaction of Spanish and Portuguese fans after the goal was described, capturing the shift in emotions of fans and players around the goal. However, compared to the Chinese commentary, the English lacked a description of Ronaldo's psychological pressure before the goal and the portrayal of the player's facial expressions, which were highlighted in the Chinese version. Additionally, the Chinese commentators linked the ball's trajectory with the "C" in Ronaldo's name, enhancing the viewing experience with poetic praises of Ronaldo. However, the English commentary's record mention helps non-football fans appreciate the greatness of the star, which is important for a global event like the World Cup, attracting many non-fans.

REC:

Commentator: As so often, Portugal's hopes rest on Cristiano Ronaldo's shoulders. Referee trying to get the wall back the required distance. Cristiano Ronaldo. His gaze was firm, with a hint of killer instinct in his eyes. Oh, genius! Absolute genius! The ball traced a 'C' arc in the air, symbolizing his name, Cristiano! Look at De gea's position. He's not gonna get that, is he? Busquets and Piqué tried their best to jump, but their leap was like a measure of the apex of Ronaldo's free-kick. It brushed past their hair, with their tips flying in its wake. Up. Over the wall. Down. Under the crossbar. Exemplary, perfection, and it's all square in Sochi, and it's a hat-trick for Cristiano Ronaldo. Ah, the Spanish heart's been broken right at the end. It's his sixth hat-trick for Portugal, his 51st in his career, and it's the 51st hat-trick at a World Cup Finals.

The English commentary was enriched with a description of Ronaldo's determined look before taking the free kick, along with the trajectory of the ball related to Ronaldo's name, using rhetorical devices to enhance the viewing experience. Descriptions of the other players' actions, besides the goalkeeper, were added to underscore the brilliance of the goal.

RCC:

Commentator 1: C罗在丈量着距离,把自己大腿上的肌肉向世人展现了出来。目光中透漏着一丝坚定,也透露着一丝凶狠。

Commentator 2: C罗射门,漂亮!球进了!87分钟,C罗帽子戏法!翩若惊鸿,宛若游龙。C罗上演了帽子戏法,他用一记任意球在空中写了一个C字,这是属于C罗的标志。难以置信,这场比赛太精彩了。

Commentator 1: 这是一个经典的伊比利亚半岛的德比啊,这个球绕过了人墙迅速的下坠,C罗典型的电梯球,打的德赫亚是目瞪口呆啊。

Commentator 2: 布斯克斯和皮克两个人已经尽全力去起跳,但是这两个人的起跳就像是C罗打出的这记任意球的制高点的测量尺一样。擦着他们的头发,他们的发梢飞了过去。

Commentator 1: 索契的这个夜晚还是属于C罗的。看台上的两国球迷形成了鲜明的对比,葡萄牙球迷的狂欢衬托着西班牙球迷的落寞,但这就是竞技体育,不到最后一刻你永远不知道会发生什么。

Commentator 2: 这是C罗在国家队上演的第6次帽子戏法, 职业生涯第51次, 我坚信未来这个数字一定还会上涨! 这就是C罗!

The original Chinese commentary was already excellent, but, taking cues from the English version, two main additions were made: descriptions of the fans in the stands, deepening the viewers' immersion by showing the reactions of fans from both countries, and information about Ronaldo's records, introducing the football non-enthusiasts to his exceptional achievements.

#### Example 4:

SCI:

On October 27, 2018, the League of Legends World Championship semi-finals, S8, took place in South Korea, where the Chinese team IG faced off against the European team G2. IG's top laner, TheShy, playing Jayce, executed brilliant plays in the second game, almost single-handedly securing the win for his team. His outstanding performance continued throughout the series, helping IG to clinch the best-of-five series with ease and advance to the finals.



Figure 10: TheShy, wielding Jayce, initially repels Wunder's Aatrox



Figure 11: TheShy skillfully dodges the ultimate from Perkz's Ireliia



Figure 12: TheShy eliminates Perkz's Irelia

EC:

Commentator 1: Back in Champion select, I mentioned how this champion has been his most played throughout the tournament, but it seems like the nerves are getting the better of him here in the semi-finals, as TheShy will get the better of Wunder once again.

Commentator 2: Oh God!

Commentator 1: WorldEnder going to be used, keeping Wunder alive. TheShy trying to disengage now, but instead... find somebody around! This man is a monster! And Perkz will be beaten down!

Commentator 2: He actually kills him with the W-A-O-E, but the damage was done earlier. Secondary member goes out. How many bad guys do you need to take down TheShy?

Commentator 3: Mid lane may be Perkz's lane king, but the top lane belongs to TheShy! TheShy looks like he's playing a single player game, and everybody on G2 are the monsters coming after him that he is just smashing down.

CC:

Commentator 1: 上路又来了! 大灭先开出来吧! 这个位置回身, 阿P来了, the shy这边没闪现要小心一点, 回身走位躲大招!

Commentator 2/3: 哇哦!

Commentator 2: TheShy这边要单杀了!

Commentator 1: 你秀, 你秀, 你继续秀啊! 这个位置追着你最后一榔头。

Commentator 2: 天不生TheShy, LPL上单万古如长夜。这一波一秀二。这个伤害没看懂。

Commentator 1: 没看懂。

Commentator 2: 阿P没有想到, 他全身都是魔法抗性。

Commentator 3: 对, 面对这个杰斯没有任何办法, 而且这个杰斯他会凌波微步你知道吧。

CA:

In the English commentary, there was a detailed description of the events in the game, but it lacked the specifics of TheShy's most spectacular maneuver—evading the opponent's ultimate ability. Although some details were added later, the immediate lack of them lessened the viewing experience. In contrast, the Chinese commentary provided essential information before the combat started and described TheShy's impressive moves, a detail that should be reflected in the revised English commentary. Additionally, the Chinese commentary included a rewritten Chinese

poem, showcasing TheShy's dominance in the league, which became a memorable line. Incorporating classical poetry can enhance the viewing experience, allowing the audience to appreciate the player's skill through the meaning conveyed in the poem. However, the Chinese commentary still contained numerous interjections and colloquialisms, which, although emphatic, should be reduced in the revised version.

REC:

Commentator 1: Back in Champion select, I mentioned how this champion has been his most played throughout the tournament, but it seems like the nerves are getting the better of him here in the semi-finals, as TheShy will get the better of Wunder once again.

Commentator 2: Oh God!

Commentator 1: WorldEnder going to be used, keeping Wunder alive. TheShy without flash, trying to disengage now, but instead TheShy deftly dodges Perkz's ultimate with a slick move! This man is a monster! And Perkz will be beaten down!

Commentator 2: TheShy is like Harry Potter with his Apparition skills. He actually kills him with the W-A-O-E, but the damage was done earlier. Secondary member goes out. How many bad guys do you need to take down TheShy?

Commentator 3: Mid lane may be Perkz's lane king, but the top lane belongs to TheShy! TheShy is the sun that eclipses all other stars in the top lane.

In the revised commentary, the description of TheShy lacking the Flash spell (a key escape ability) was added to heighten the suspense. Details of how TheShy dodged the opponent's ultimate ability through his positioning were expanded, enhancing the viewing experience even for those unfamiliar with the game. Additionally, the translation likened TheShy's moves to teleportation in Harry Potter, aligning the experience for audiences from different cultures and deepening their engagement. Following the Chinese commentary, praises for TheShy were refined to intensify the audience's reaction.

RCC:

Commentator 1: 在本次世界赛上, Wunder选手选择最多的英雄就是剑魔, 上路又打起来了! Wunder大招先开出来吧! 这个位置回身想要反打, Perkz来了, the shy这边没闪现要小心一点, 回身走位扭掉了Perkz的大招!

Commentator 2/3: 哇哦!

Commentator : The shy这边完成了反杀! 对方两名选手阵亡, 到底G2要多少人才能够终结Theshy?

Commentator 2: 天生the shy, LPL上单万古如长夜。这一波一秀二。Perkz没有想到, 他全身都是魔法抗性, 根本无法击败Theshy。

Commentator 3: 对, 面对这个杰斯没有任何办法, 而且Theshy的杰斯会凌波微步, 不是普通的杰斯。

During revision, the language was streamlined by removing some interjections and adding background on Wunder, TheShy's opponent, highlighting TheShy's superiority even against Wunder's best champion. Other parts required only minor adjustments to ensure both Chinese and international audiences shared a comparable viewing experience.

## 5. CONCLUSIONS AND LIMITATIONS

The feasibility of employing functional equivalence theory to refine bilingual sports commentary in Chinese and English has been substantiated through this research. Utilizing this theoretical framework can enrich the viewer experience by providing more engaging and contextually resonant narratives, ensuring the seamless conveyance of both emotional and informational content across languages. Analysis of case studies has illuminated several shortcomings in Chinese commentary, including the disarray caused by an excessive number of commentators, the frequent use of interjections and informal language, a scarcity of detailed game descriptions, and a general lack of

professionalism. These problems were less common in English commentary, which, conversely, tends to underutilize proverbs or idioms that effectively encapsulate game situations. Incorporating these linguistic elements, drawing from the Chinese commentary style and informed by a comparative analysis, could markedly improve the viewer experience. The inherent complementarity of Chinese and English commentary, as revealed in this study, affirms that the functional equivalence translation theory can facilitate the successful enhancement of sports commentary, fostering a narrative that aptly reflects the cultural and linguistic subtleties of both target audiences.

The study of sports commentary optimization through textual analysis alone is insufficient, as sports broadcasting is an amalgamation of visuals and commentary. Future research could benefit from integrating multimodal translation theories or other relevant frameworks to conduct a detailed analysis that combines both visual and textual elements. This would allow for moment-specific optimizations and ultimately enhance the overall quality of sports commentary. By focusing on these aspects, we can work towards a more holistic approach to sports commentary that considers all facets of the broadcasting experience.

Additionally, due to the scope limitations of this analysis, the paper does not delve into the explanation of specific professional expressions unique to each sports domain. This omission might lead to confusion among readers who are not familiar with the jargon or nuances of the particular sports being discussed. Future studies should aim to incorporate a glossary or explanatory notes on such terminologies to make the content more accessible to a broader audience, thereby eliminating potential misunderstandings and enriching the reader's comprehension of the commentary's intricacies.

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