

On Translation of Chinese-Specific Expressions in Publicity Translation in the Light of Skopostheorie- A Case Study on Xi Jinping: The Governance of China IV

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Abstract

Translation of Chinese-specific expressions is among the toughest parts for international communication, since the language has shaped profound expressions that are unique to the nation only. *Xi Jinping: the Governance of China*, as a compilation on China's international publicity, is an authoritative work with Chinese characteristics that demonstrates the country's latest developments. This paper, taking *Xi Jinping: the Governance of China IV* as an example, explores the strategies and methods in translating Chinese-specific expressions at lexical and syntactical levels in the light of Skopostheorie, thereby providing a reference to the future study of international publicity translation.

Keywords

Skopostheorie, International publicity translation, Chinese-specific expressions.

1. Introduction

Thanks to reform and opening up since the 1970s, China has gradually gone global and engaged in international communication in a positive manner. China and the other countries are connected even more close. It is essential to develop the capability for international communication. To this end, there is a need to demonstrate an all-around China that is true and comprehensive by telling Chinese stories well, as was emphasized at the 20th CPC National Congress. Translation, as a bridge that connects the Chinese nation and other countries, to a large extent determines whether our culture can go global and how influential it will be. With the march of globalization, international publicity translation has been attached great importance to in our country's foreign affairs and translation study, bringing about both opportunities and challenges.

International publicity, with the Chinese language as the source of information and foreign languages as the target, aims to spread Chinese culture and build up an authentic image to the international community[1]. It plays a critical part in international engagement and has been one of the most discussed topics in translation academia. With a history of more than 5,000 years, Chinese language has developed its unique expressions that embody its own images, including poems and the specific usage of words. These culture-loaded expressions constitute key and tough parts of international publicity translation. Taking *Xi Jinping: the Governance of China IV* as the example, this paper aims to delve into the strategies and methods in dealing with Chinese-specific expressions in terms of lexis and syntax.

2. Theoretical Framework

Skopostheorie, which emerged from functionalist translation theory in Germany in the 1970s by Hans J. Vermeer's , introduces a fresh perspective to the art of translation[2]. This perspective differs from traditional source-text orientated views, offering a more

comprehensive understanding of the translation process. Vermeer's theory is based on action theory, which posits that every action is purposeful. Accordingly, the translators should abide by three rules: the rules of skopos, coherence, and fidelity.

The skopos rule, the fundamental of the three rules, is interpreted as aim, purpose, intention, and function. It specifically contains the translator's goal, the text's communicational goal, and the expected goal through a particular method. Using the skopos rule as a guide, strategies are selected. Therefore, translators are supposed to make clear their purpose in a given translational context and thus make a decision on which method to adopt on the basis of the purpose. Coherence rule refers to intratextual coherence that requires to interpret source text in a coherent manner. The rule can be compared to a bridge that connects the source language sender and the target recipient. To this end, there is a need to coordinate the target language and the target readers in a given cultural context. The translator are supposed to satisfy the requirements of the target readers as much as possible. Readability and acceptability are two factors to be considered for translation. Fidelity rule requires the translator to be loyal to the source text and take into account semantic coherence. Christine Nord developed the principle of "function plus loyalty", which can be seen as a combination of the skopos rule and the fidelity rule, believing that loyalty is a manifestation of interpersonal relationships in a social context[3]. As a result, translators should take into account the requirements and expectations of all parties involved in communication.

3. Translation Analysis

Chinese-specific expressions provide a comprehensive understanding of China's current situation and development, and facilitates communication and cooperation at home and abroad. In this section, focus is on the translation of *Xi Jinping: the Governance of China IV* and explain how the Skopostheorie is reflected in the context.

3.1. Translation at Lexical Level

As a typical representative of political publication, this book contains many political terms with Chinese characteristics, referring to expressions that reflect China's unique political, economic, cultural and national conditions as well as modes of thinking. In addition to those politics-related vocabulary, the uniqueness is also shown in its varied forms, as demonstrated in the following analyses.

3.1.1. Numeral-related terms

In Chinese political language, many terms are shortened with numerals. The points that intend to express are generalized with numerals. These terms are concise and commonly used in such a context. However, when translated into English literally, these terms might confuse the target readers, especially when the target readers are not familiar with Chinese politics.

我们必须继续完成“三去一降一补”的重要任务。

To this end, we must continue to carry out the priority tasks of cutting over-capacity, reducing excess inventory, deleveraging, lowering costs, and strengthening areas of weakness.

我们共护安全稳定，率先提出打击“三股势力”。

We have ensured security and stability. We were the first to issue a call to arms against terrorism, separatism and extremism.

破除“四唯”现象。

We should discard the criteria that overemphasize research papers, academic titles, educational backgrounds, and awards.

In Chinese, “三去一降一补”, “三股势力” and ““四维”现象” all bear extended concepts that are generalized into numbers, whose meanings are widely known to the source language readers.

However, it is difficult to understand for English readers who are not familiar with the abbreviation. According to the skopos rule, the purpose of translation determines the choice of tactics. In examples above, the translator employs free translation and omits the numerical forms of the original text, keeping the core meaning of the phrases. In this way, the target language readers would have better comprehension. Similarly, in some texts, “六稳” and “六保” are two political terms that are known to Chinese readers. The two terms are highly generalized and each represents six aspects, while simple versions such as “six stabilities” and “six priorities” are incomprehensible to English readers. The translator not only illustrates the specific connotation for each term, but also retains their original form with numbers, as in “stabilize the Six Fronts” and “guarantee the Six Priorities”. Compared with the sheer free translation which omits the original number, such a method conforms to the fidelity rule. By keeping the original number following the Chinese language, the version is highly recognizable in promoting China’s international image. Nowadays, many western media are increasingly reporting Chinese political terms like “三个代表”, “四个全面” and “五位一体” with their original forms only, which reflects the fact that Chinese-specific terms are gradually accepted by westerners.

3.1.2. Four-character expressions

There is a wide range of four-character expressions in Chinese language, which are concise in form and profound in meaning. When reading the original text, readers can be easily attracted by the four-character structure. With an orderly and concise form, the language appears to be more powerful and persuasive. However, it also brings about challenges to the translator. On the one hand, if orderly forms of these expressions can be embodied in the translation, it would indirectly demonstrate the beauty and the force of Chinese language to foreigners. On the other hand, however, when the translation is restricted to form, the conveyance of meaning would be influenced. Needless to say, it would be better if the translation would express meaning as well as the form, but they seem to be contradictory in most cases. Therefore, it is a matter of the choice between form and meaning. According to the skopos rule, purpose determines tactics. In order to facilitate the target readers’ understanding of Chinese cultural and political backgrounds, meaning counts most, which means that the translator can pursue the beauty of form provided that meaning is completely conveyed.

共同创造了胸怀大局、自信开放、迎难而上、追求卓越、共创未来的北京冬奥精神。

fostered a spirit of the Beijing Winter Olympics and Paralympics-having a broad vision, staying confident and open, rising to the occasion, pursuing excellence, and creating a better future together.

“不为钱来，不为利往，农民才能信你，才能听你。”

“Farmers will only trust you and listen to you if you show that you are not for personal gain.”

In example 1, the original text uses a series of phrases to illustrate the spirit of the Beijing Olympics, which is perfectly orderly in form. The translated text not only conveys the exact meaning of each phrase, but also shows a proper form, taking a balance between form and meaning. In example 2, the sentences are in fact in a colloquial context. “来往” is a commonly used word in Chinese, which means “exchange”. As for the original text, the two phrases in fact convey the same meaning-not seek for personal gain, and are coordinated to enhance the degree of force. Taking it into consideration, the translation employs the same style as the original text and simplifies them as the core meaning, which takes on a more concise form that is in line with the target readers’ mindset.

3.2. Translation at syntactic level

In this section, two special sentence patterns are analyzed: non-subject sentences and poems, both of which are of Chinese characteristics.

3.2.1. Non-subject Sentence

English is a language of hypotaxis, featured by strict grammatical rules, in which a subject is a requirement in a sentence in most cases and the logical relation between each constituent is represented by conjunctions, such as “and”, “but” and “or”. Chinese is a typical language of parataxis, characterized by a loose structure. In many cases, including formal texts, the subject of a sentence is often omitted, either because it may have shown up in the text above, or because there is no need for the existence at all. It is worth noting that not all the beginning part of a Chinese sentence serves as a subject. Some do, and some are just an adverbial modifier, the topic or some other constituents.

实现“双碳”目标，不是别人让我们做，而是我们自己必须要做。

We pursue the goals of peak carbon dioxide emissions and carbon neutrality not under compulsion but of own accord.

要夯实发展根基。要深化政治互信，发展政策沟通的引领和催化作用，探索建立更多合作对接机制，推动把政治共识转化为具体行动、把理念认同转化为务实成果。

Consolidate the foundations for Belt and Road cooperation. We must expand mutual political trust and strengthen policy coordination to guide and facilitate cooperation. We must explore and establish more cooperation mechanisms and turn political consensus into concrete actions, and shared vision into tangible results.

With reference to the previous text, it can be easily inferred that the non-subject sentence functions as a repeal or suggestion. Therefore, the English version of the sentence can add the subject “we” or “people”. In this way, the translated text becomes more coherent, so the target readers can fully comprehend the sentence, which is a demonstration of coherence rule. In example 2, many clauses lack the specific subject in form. As for the first clause, the translator interprets it as an imperative sentence, which is equivalent to the source text in both form and meaning. For the next several clauses, it is obvious that the subject is the communicators involved. Therefore, the translation combines every two clauses with a single subject, which is concise in form and also conveys the full meaning. The translated text supplement subject of the predicate, making it grammatically correct and easy to understand. It complies with the skopos rule and coherence rule.

3.2.2. Poems

In the speeches and conferences that are recorded in this book, Xi Jinping cited a wealth of idioms and proverbs related to Chinese history, culture and religion[4]. Usually, these expressions are couplets and have profound connotations with few words. The poems are condensed into a few words so that it is difficult to find a corresponding English word. Although the fidelity rule requires the target language to be consistent with the source text in form, it is quite hard for the translator to retain the original form without the loss of meaning. From the perspective of Skopostheorie, the skopos rule matters most. If the translation sought orderliness in form but ignores the purpose of the translation, it would be unqualified. Therefore, free translation is usually adopted in dealing with these expressions, so that the linguistic features and structure would be kept as much as possible provided that the meaning is fully conveyed.

“为有牺牲多壮志，敢教日月换新天。”

Our minds grow stronger for the martyrs' sacrifice, daring to make the sun and the moon shine in the new sky.

“青山一道同云雨，明月何曾是两乡。”

“Green hills bathe in the same cloud and rain. The same moon lights up towns however far away.”

“慎易以避难，敬细以远大。”

“We should manage the small and simple things with care so as to avoid difficulties and disasters.”

In above examples, free translation is adopted, which expresses the full meaning of the poem yet influences the form to some degree. In order to facilitate the target readers' understanding of the sentences, the pursuit of form is undermined to some extent. The two clauses in example 3 form the beauty in pattern. The translator combines these clauses into a single sentence, conjoining the same constituent, which is in compliance with the coherence rule.

要有“横眉冷对千夫指，俯首甘为孺子牛”的精神，歌颂真善美、针砭假恶丑。

Keep in mind the famous lines:“ Holding my head high in defiance of the enemy's attacks, bowing my head low in obedience to the people.” Exalt the true, the good, and the beautiful while rejecting the false, the evil, and the ugly.

In the above example, the translated texts not only convey the full meaning, but also manage to pursue the stylistic feature in form. It is worth mentioning that “holding” and “bowing” in example 6 together form a rhyme, which conforms to the stylistic feature of the text in line with the coherence rule. In addition, “千夫指” literally means a deal of finger-pointing, and “孺子牛” the painstaking farm cattle, both having a profound connotation in the Chinese context. However, the translator does not point out what the two words in fact refer to, but translate the images into what it embodies culturally, so as to facilitate the target readers' understanding, which conforms to the skopos rule.

4. Conclusion

Xi Jinping: the Governance of China IV, as the typical work that collects the wisdom of governing a country in the new era, is definitely worthy of study as a case of international publicity translation. Based on the Skopostheorie, the purpose of the compilation is very clear, aiming to introduce China's philosophies in governing the country and modernization with Chinese characteristics. This paper focused on the categorization of expressions of Chinese characteristics, their translation strategies, and how these strategies reflect the three rules of Skopostheorie. By analyzing these examples, it is believed that the Skopostheorie can be used as a guiding principle for translating texts in international publicity translation. The skopos rule means that the purpose of the target text will determine the translation strategies. The coherence rule, or discourse coherence, requires that the target text be readable and that it does not cause difficulties in terms of grammar and logic. Applying the fidelity rule, the target text should be faithful to the original text. However, fidelity rule does not imply word-for-word direct translation, but requires the translator to be flexible in translation. The analysis of the translation is based on the Skopostheorie, which in turn demonstrates the practicability of the theory. However, it should be noted that this paper does not cover every aspect of the translation in practice, but only offers a strategic orientation of international publicity translation.

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