

Original Paper

The Translation Strategies of Chinese-characteristic Vocabulary from the Perspective of Eco-translatology—Taking *the 2023 Chinese Government Work Report* as an Example

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Abstract

The English translation of the Chinese government Work Report every year is of great international significance and function. It provides other governments and the public with access to key information about China's policy direction, governance measures, and social progress. It is also an important means for China to showcase its national image, promote economic development and strengthen its global partnerships. This paper attempts to interpret and analyze the English version of the government work report from the perspective of Eco-translatology, and sort out the translation strategies of a large number of words with Chinese characteristics so as to provide new ideas and perspectives for the translation and dissemination of Chinese excellent culture.

Keywords

Eco-translatology, the Government Work Report, translation strategy

1. Introduction

Eco-translatology can be understood as an ecological approaches to translation studies or a translation study from an ecological perspective (Hu, 2008). Eco-translatology believes that translation is not only a conversion between languages, but a complex system that includes many elements (such as culture, society, history, economy, etc.). In this system, all the elements are interrelated and influence each other. Just like the biological diversity in natural ecosystems, translation should also respect the cultural diversity of the source and target languages. Eco-translatology emphasizes the adaptation and variation of translation in different environments (such as different cultures, different reader groups, etc.) to achieve the best translation results.

On the other hand, the English translation of words with Chinese characteristics has always been the focus and difficulty in translation. The English version of *the 2023 Chinese Government Work Report*, through accurate and comprehensive translation of a large number of words with Chinese characteristics, can effectively convey policy intentions, programs and future plans of China, and help to shape and improve China's image on the international stage.

This article will discuss the English translation of the Chinese characteristics vocabulary in *the 2023 Government Work Report* from the following aspects:

2. The Principle of Harmony and Unity

Eco-translatology believes that translation is an integrated, harmonious and unified system (Hu, 2008). In the process of translation, the translator should balance the relationship between the translation and the source text, the target and the source language culture, and strive to achieve the harmonious coexistence of language, culture, emotion and values.

From the perspective of "text transplantation", the "harmonious unity" of the Eco-translatology means that in the process of transplanting a text from one cultural environment to another, the translated text needs to be faithful to the original text and take into account the acceptability and customs of the target culture, so that the translated text can naturally integrate into the new cultural environment.

This process requires the translator not only to have a deep knowledge of the source and target languages, but also a profound understanding and respect for both cultures. Only in this way can the translation not lose the connotation and charm of the original text, but also be accepted and appreciated by the readers of the target culture circle, so as to realize the interaction and harmony between the source and the target text, and finally achieve a "harmonious and unified" translation ecology.

Example 1: 面对风高浪急的国际环境和艰巨繁重的国内改革发展稳定任务

Translation: *In the face of high winds and choppy waters in the international environment and challenging tasks in promoting reform, development, and stability at home.*

The Chinese characteristic words such as "风高浪急" (strong wind and roaring waves) and "艰巨繁重" (extremely difficult) are well-known expressions in Chinese, but their inherent profound meaning is often incomprehensible for English readers if a blunt literal translation is used, which cannot reflect the language tension of the "concise and clear" and "every word with a specific meaning" style unique to Chinese official documents. However, excessive domestication is easy to fall into the prim mode of Western-style official documents and cannot accurately convey the distinct Chinese style in the original text. Therefore, the translator wisely translate the words as "high winds and choppy waters" and "challenging tasks", which not only accurately conveys the Chinese core, but also is easy to understand, paving the way for Western readers to catch the original meaning of the report. From the perspective of Eco-translatology, the "text transplantation" is very successful.

3. The Significance of “Translator-As-The-Key-Role “

All adaptation and choice behaviors in translation activities depend on the translator’s own judgment and decision-making, therefore the translator is in a central position and plays a leading role in this process (Hu, 2004, pp. 21-22). In the Eco-translatology perspective, translators are seen as a bridge connecting the source language and target language culture. They are not only a medium for language conversion, but also a participant in cultural dissemination and communication. This viewpoint holds that translators should have the initiative to use their professional knowledge and creativity to process and reshape the original text, in order to better adapt to the target language environment and meet audience expectations. The “translator-as-the-key-role” theory requires translators to have a high degree of self-awareness and responsibility, to be aware of their value and role in translation activities, as well as the potential impact on translation quality. They should be able to flexibly adjust translation strategies based on the expectations and aesthetic preferences of the target readers so that they can achieve the best effect of cultural transmission.

Example 2: 既果断加大力度，又不搞“大水漫灌”、透支未来

Translation: *We took decisive measures to step up macro policy support while refraining from adopting a deluge of strong stimulus policies that would eat into our potential for future growth.*

It is not difficult to see from a detailed reading of the *2023 Government Work Report* that most Chinese style official document reports use sentence with no subject. As seen in Example 2, the sentence with no subject with Chinese characteristics emphasize the collective rather than the individual, reflecting the values of collectivism and emphasizing teamwork and joint efforts. These sentences make the report more concise and make readers pay more attention to the information itself.

However, in the English context, subject-less sentences often express the meaning of “command” or “imperative”, which contradicts the principle of “objective statement” in the original report. Therefore, the translator added a logical subject “we” at the beginning of the sentence to make the translation logically coherent and grammatically correct.

Secondly, the essence of the statement “大水漫灌” (flood) and “透支未来” (overdraft the future) in the report is that the central government will not excessively issue currency to avoid negative impacts on future economic growth. The translator uses “debug” here to refer to the “大水漫灌” in the original text, and adds “stimulus policies” to clarify the essence of the problem, so that English readers can have a clear and comprehensive understanding of the active monetary policy implemented by the Chinese government. From this, it can be seen that the “translator-as-the-key-role” concept advocates giving translators more freedom and initiative on the basis of respecting the original text, emphasizing the subjectivity of translators in translation activities and better dealing with the diversity and complexity in translation practice.

4. Adaptation/Selection of Translation Behaviors

From the perspective of Eco-translatology, “Translation is adaptation and selection; Translator centered; The best translation is the cumulative result of the translator’s multidimensional adaptation and adaptability to the translation ecosystem; For translators, the fittest survives and develops; For translations, the fittest remains and works (Hu, 2004, pp. 11-12). Thus it can be seen that the adaptation/selection of translation behavior is the process of how translators make adaptive responses and strategic choices in a complex and ever-changing translation ecosystem. This requires translators not only to have a profound language and cultural foundation, but also to have a high level of judgment and decision-making ability, so that they can find the best path of “adaptive selection” and “selective adaptation” in a diverse translation environment.

Example 3: 大道至简，政简易行。

Translation: *Great truths are always simple, and simple government administration is always most effective.*

The concept of “道” (Tao) comes from *Tao and Teh* by Lao-Tzu. It refers to the fundamental principle that is often extremely simple. “大道至简” means by stripping away complex and redundant appearances, one can find the essence of things. It is an important concept proposed in the work reports of the Chinese government in recent years. It emphasizes that the government should pursue simplicity, efficiency, and fairness in management and services, simplify procedures, and optimize services, decreasing government power for the increasing of market vitality. Such kind of traditional Chinese cultural concept as “道” has always been an almost insurmountable challenge in translation. Therefore, the translation of “道” has always been controversial and inconclusive. Some translate it as “Tao”. This is the most commonly used English expression for “道”, which is directly derived from the transliteration of Wade-Giles romanization; some also translate it as “Way” to emphasize its philosophical and symbolic meaning of “the road”. But the translation of “道” in this report is “Great truths”, which fully reflects the translator’s profound understanding of the ecological environment of Chinese and English. Because whether translated as “Tao” or “Way” here, it is difficult to accurately match the expression style of Chinese official document as formal work reports and can easily lead readers to confusion and speculation. “The language style of official documents is accurate and serious, rarely using visual terms, and avoiding the use of flashy words and phrases that may cause irrelevant associations and distract attention.” (Luo, 1985) The translation “Great truths” can fully convey the essence of China’s excellent traditional culture represented by *Tao and Teh*; Secondly, it also echoes the concept of “simple government administration” in the following text, allowing English readers to fully understand that the concept of “simplified administration” here is different from the concept of “small government” in Western governance concepts. It not only reflects the Chinese government’s governing program as a continuation and sublimation of China’s excellent traditional culture, but also clarifies the unique Chinese ideology conveyed by this concept through concise descriptions.

5. The Responsibility of “Making A Difference in Translation”

Gu Zhengkun believes that readers can be divided into seven types: people who don't know foreign languages at all, language experts, foreign language masters, academic readers, general readers, readers for entertainment and readers acquiring new knowledge (Gu, 2003). Undoubtedly, most English readers who will keep track of and read Chinese government reports are mostly academic readers and those who are eager to acquire new knowledge about China. Such readers often receive a good education, pay attention to international current affairs, have a global perspective, and are themselves influential social opinion forces. Translators can influence and inspire these readers through accurate, pragmatic, and logical translations. Among these audience groups, some people who understand China, respect China, and are willing to know more about China may emerge. This will be extremely beneficial for enhancing China's international image and promoting the construction of China's voice. Because fundamentally, “news reporting has become a unique ideology in the superstructure that controls and influences social consciousness, and people have no reason or ability to reject its ideological nature.” (Liu, 1991)

Example 4: 奋斗铸就辉煌，实干赢得未来。

Translation: *Great achievements can only come from hard work; a bright future can only be secured through solid efforts.*

Example 5: 砥砺前行，...，全面推进中华民族伟大复兴

Translation: *Let us forge ahead with perseverance and resolve,...,Let us strive to advance national rejuvenation on all fronts*

In Example 4, the couplet expression used in the original text is a common way in Chinese, but in the English translation, the way the subject and object exchange positions is clearly more in line with English thinking. In addition, the original text in Chinese is an active sentence, while the second sentence in the translation is changed into a passive sentence. The advantage of doing so is that it avoids the dull and straightforward nature of literal translation, making the translated text brilliant and coherent. In Example 5, “砥砺前行” originally referred to a sharpening stone (commonly used in Chinese to express hardship and perseverance), but the translator cleverly transformed it into an adverbial form of “with persistence and resolve”, which perfectly reproduces the profound meaning of “forging ahead” in the English context. From the politically correct, precise, and clear translations above, it can be seen that the professional competence and political consciousness of the translator themselves are very important. How to accurately and vividly present these “new Chinese cultural concepts and ideas” in the target language, and how to usher these ideas into the deep down inside of Western readers through translation interpretation, is a glorious and arduous task. Therefore, the author believes that for most Chinese translators, understanding and grasping the “Four Consciousnesses” has important guiding significance. Although these principles mainly target civil servants. However, they can also provide guidance on professional spirit and working attitude for translators to a certain extent, especially those engaged in translation related to external publicity work. This means that when translating, the translator should have

a correct understanding of China's major policies and trends, consciously maintain and actively advocate those policies, and always adhere to the correct political direction and stance.

6. The Lasting Impact of The Most Suitable

Eco-translatology believes that the process of translation is the continuous selection and adaptation of translators in the language ecological environment. In this process, the translator needs to find the strategy and path with the highest degree of integration, adaptation and selection based on the ecological environment of the source and target languages. Its purpose is to actively adapt to the survival rule of "The Lasting Impact of The Most suitable" in the translation process, "so that the works can have a lasting impact after adapting to the translation ecological environment." (Wang, 2012)

Example 6: 坚持绿水青山就是金山银山的理念。

Translation: *Staying true to the idea that lucid waters and lush mountains are invaluable assets.*

Example 7: 百年大计，教育为本。

Translation: *Education is pivotal to the enduring prosperity of a country.*

The golden phrase "绿水青山就是金山银山" (green mountains and clear waters are like mountains of gold and silver) in China now has been well-known, and its corresponding translations are also numerous, each with its own unique features. However, from the perspective of meaningful expression, equivalent effects, and even phonetic rhythm, "Lucid waters and lush mountains are invaluable assets" is an outstanding translation that is unconventional, creative, and easy to understand. Similarly, in the translation of "百年大计，教育为本" (education is the foundation of a century's plan), "Education is pivotal to the enduring prosperity of a country" can also be regarded as the finishing touch, explaining the unspoken words and meanings that were hidden in the original text, truly achieving conciseness and hitting the nail on the head. Although the vast majority of Western readers may never read the original text of government work reports in Chinese throughout their lives, the Chinese translators inject life and vitality into a large number of Chinese characteristic vocabulary through their own interpretation, creation, and reconstruction. They successfully achieved the reproduction of texts in heterogeneous contexts with completely new semantic constructions. It is precisely through the diligent efforts of these translators that the original text is able to break through the boundaries of space and national borders, as well as ethnic and cultural boundaries, truly enabling the dissemination of Chinese characteristic ideas and culture to various parts of the world. They have made indelible contributions to telling the story of China well at different levels and in different fields.

Undoubtedly, only such an excellent translation can make Chinese thoughts widely recognized and accepted at the global cultural level. Only in this way can Chinese stories truly take root in the target language and gain long-term vitality. To some extent, the English translation of the Chinese government work report is not just a document translation, but also a guideline for unifying ideas and improving awareness within the English language domain, providing the most official, standardized, and authoritative English interpretation for readers around the world. An excellent translation can not only

provide high-quality translation in specific scenarios, but its presentation and influence can also be passed down for a long time, providing valuable information and inspiration for subsequent research in other countries. Introducing these expressions with Chinese characteristics into the minds of Western readers through the perfect interpretation and translation, forming a consensus among some readers in Western society, and even evolving into common beliefs, is itself a great success.

7. Conclusions

Eco-translatology holds that the process of translation is a continuous process of selection and adaptation by the translator in the language ecological environment. When studying the translation strategies of Chinese characteristic vocabulary, researchers can start from the perspective of Eco-translatology and explore and analyze the most suitable translation strategies from the perspectives of “The Principle of Harmony and Unity”, “The Significance of ‘Translator-As-The-Key-Role’”, “Adaptation/Selection of Translation Behaviors”, “The Responsibility of ‘Making A Difference in Translation’”, and “The Lasting Impact of The Most suitable”, etc.

The English translation of *the 2023 Government Work Report of China* outlines a clear, meaningful, bold, and constructive road map for many translators. The analysis of the report indicates that for the translation of Chinese characteristic vocabulary, translators need to adapt from multiple dimensions based on factors such as the meaning, cultural connotations, and context of the vocabulary, and then choose the most suitable strategy from multiple possible translation strategies in order to fully exert the translator’s subjectivity and creativity and achieve better results.

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