



Research on the English Translation Methods of Government Texts from the Perspective of Functional Equivalence Theory

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Abstract

With the continuous improvement of China's comprehensive national strength, governments around the world are paying high attention to the dynamics of China in all aspects. As a carrier of Chinese culture to the world, the English translation text of government is one of the important ways for the world to know and learn about China. Eugene Nida's functional equivalence theory emphasizes the correspondence between the original text and the target text in form and content. Under the guidance of functional equivalence theory, starting from the translation practice of government texts, the author analyzes the translation characteristics of such texts combined with cases, discusses the methods and skills in translation practice, and strives to achieve functional equivalence between the two languages, so as to establish a good international image for China.

Subject Areas

Linguistics

Keywords

Functional Equivalence Theory, Government Texts, English Translation

1. Introduction

In recent years, China has made remarkable development achievements, and China's international status has risen. Governments around the world are paying high attention to the dynamics of China in all aspects. As a window to understand and learn about China, the English translation of government texts is vital. At the same time, as a publicity text of China, the English translation text of

government is related to China's reputation and voice in the international community. Therefore, the translator should strengthen in-depth exploration to establish China's international image. Under the guidance of functional equivalence theory, the author focuses on the government texts, and analyzes how to realize functional equivalence in the process of translation practice.

2. Functional Equivalence Theory

Functional equivalence theory was proposed by the American translation theorist Eugene Nida in 1969. Literally, functional equivalence mainly refers to the realization of functional equivalence in the process of translation according to the cultural roots of the two languages. In the actual translation process, if there is no corresponding standard for the conversion between the source language and the target language, it will lead to translation ambiguity. Nida believed that translation was to reproduce the information of the source language from semantic to stylistic in the most appropriate, natural and equivalent language [1]. In the process of translation, the translator needn't overemphasize the high degree of formal consistency between the source language and the target language, but the translator should achieve functional equivalence between the two languages, namely lexical equivalence, syntactic equivalence and textual equivalence, so as to strive to create the target text that not only conforms to the semantics of the original text but also reflects the cultural characteristics of the original text. If meaning and culture cannot be taken into account at the same time, the translator can abandon formal equivalence or adopt "recreation" (explaining the cultural connotation of the source language article with the words of the target language) to make the source language and the target language achieve equivalence in meaning.

3. Characters of Government Texts

Government texts mainly refer to relevant documents and materials issued by the government, including government's work report, national principles and policies, etc., which are designed to publicize China's political ideas, governance strategies, national conditions and public opinion to readers at home and abroad. The translation of government texts requires that the content expressed in the translation should be close to the reality of China's development, China's national conditions and the psychological habits of the target readers. At the linguistic level, vocabulary, syntax and text of government texts have distinctive characteristics. There are a large number of words with Chinese characteristics on the government's work report of 2022, such as make economic stability our top priority and pursue progress while ensuring stability (稳字当头、稳中求进), routine COVID-19 control (常态化疫情防控), the employment-first policy (就业优先政策), all-around rural revitalization (乡村全面振兴), avoid a one-size-fits-all approach (防止“一刀切”), directly settle medical expenses incurred outside of a patient's home province (跨省异地就医), Hong Kong and

Macao should be governed by patriots (“爱国者治港”“爱国者治澳”), respond to population aging (应对人口老龄化), crack down on the trafficking of women and children (打击拐卖妇女儿童), achieve peak carbon emissions and carbon neutrality (碳达峰、碳中和) and so on [2]. Therefore, the annual government’s work report has attracted the attention of all walks of life at home and abroad, and some key words in the report will quickly become a hot spot because of the high attention of readers.

4. Application of Functional Equivalence Theory in Government Texts Translation

Functional equivalence theory emphasizes the correspondence and equivalence between the original text and the target text in form and content. The translator should use accurate words in the target text, with smooth form and vivid content. For the sentences in government texts, the author combines the functional equivalence theory, fully considers the social and cultural factors behind, and realizes dynamic equivalence according to the principle of functional equivalence theory [3]. In the following examples, SL represents the source language and TL represents the target language. For example:

Example (1):

SL: 中国的安全环境总体有利。

TL: Overall, China’s security environment is favorable.

Analysis:

The translation of government texts should not be too “elegant”. Where literal translation is possible, it must be literal translation, and the content should be equivalent. It is not allowed to add attitude or judgment information that does not appear in the original text at will. “中国的安全环境总体有利”, this sentence is relatively simple to translate, but the location of the word “总体” needs to be carefully considered, which can be translated into “Overall, China’s...” or be treated as an adjective, namely “overall security environment (总体的安全环境)”, which can express the same meaning. The translation of “有利” in the part of statement judgment also needs to consider the choice of words. Generally, it will be translated into “favorable”, but referring to the dictionary, it will be found that “favorable” generally does not appear alone, so the use of “remain sound” here should be more appropriate. The cultural connotation of the source language is explained with the words of the target language, so that the source language and the target language are equivalent in meaning.

Reference Version: China’s overall security environment remains sound.

Example (2):

SL: 中国与主要大国的务实合作继续发展，与周边国家的睦邻友好不断推进，与广大发展中国家的全面交往深入发展，与各国互利共赢的格局逐步形成。

TL: China’s practical cooperation with major powers continues to grow, its friendly neighborliness and friendship with neighboring countries have developed steadily, its comprehensive exchanges with developing countries have de-

veloped in depth, and a relationship of mutual benefit with other countries has gradually taken shape.

Analysis:

The author analyzes the sentence and finds that the first three clauses are juxtaposed, and the last one is a summary. In the sentence, “睦邻友好” refers to friendly relations with neighboring countries. It is necessary to simplify Chinese before translation in order to achieve semantic equivalence. The tenses of the three clauses in the translation are not consistent, which is worth considering. The last concluding sentence, “与各国互利共赢的格局逐步形成”, it can be seen that the previous content is specific information, so the translator should abandon the general words. “互利共赢” is a typical Chinese expression, which expresses the same concept in four words or even eight words. “互利共赢” is translated into “mutual benefit” or “win-win result”. Besides, the adverb in the verb part of the sentence “逐步形成” can also be omitted as appropriate.

Reference Version: China’s practical cooperation with major countries continues to grow, its friendly relations with its neighboring countries have developed steadily, and it is forging strong ties with other developing countries. This has given rise to a new relationship of mutual benefit between China and other countries.

Example (3):

SL: 中国是拥有 14 亿人口、世界上最大的发展中国家，基础差、底子薄，发展不平衡，长期饱受贫困问题困扰。中国的贫困规模之大、贫困分布之广、贫困程度之深世所罕见，贫困治理难度超乎想象。[4]

TT: China has a population of 1.4 billion, and is the largest developing country all over the world. With weak developing foundations and unbalanced development, China has been suffering from poverty for a long time. The large scale, area and extent of Chinese poverty are rather rare even from a global perspective. Therefore, the hardship for China in overcoming the poverty is beyond imagination.

Analysis:

Through the analysis of relevant parallel texts, the author finds that “底子差” can generally be translated into “weak foundation”. “现在中国已经实现脱贫”, so the tense here should use the past perfect tense of “had been”. “The large scale, area and extent of Chinese poverty are rather rare even from a global perspective.” The translation of this sentence is not expressed in place, which is fallen into Chinese-English thinking. For example, “规模之大, 分布之广, 程度之深”, the superposition of the four-character lattice here is to express the emphasis. If the translators just find a few English words to translate word-for-word, the emphasis cannot be expressed, and the target language is not clear. “Hardship” is not used properly. It is more appropriate to use “challenge” or “difficulty” here. In the process of translation, if the translator uses literal translation, the readers will not understand the meaning contained in these characteristic words of government texts. Therefore, the translator should combine im-

plied specific contents and convey accurate meaning to the readers by liberal translation, so as to realize the integrity of information expression and the equivalence of translation.

Reference Version: China is the world's largest developing country, with a population of 1.4 billion. In addition to its weak foundations and uneven development, the nation had long been plagued by poverty at a scale and a level of severity that has rarely been seen anywhere else in the world. As a result, the challenge of poverty alleviation in China almost defies imagination.

5. Conclusion

As a carrier of Chinese culture to the world, the English translation text of government is not only an authoritative document for foreign readers to know about China, but also an important channel for the Chinese government to publicize. In order to better spread Chinese culture to the world, in the process of translation, translators need to combine functional equivalence theory, analyze the original text as much as possible, and fully understand the connotation of the original text [5]. They should consider words and sentences in translation, choose the expression closest to the semantics of the original text to ensure the accuracy and faithfulness of the translation, and realize dynamic equivalence. The author hopes that the research will have a certain guiding role in the English translation of government texts and promote the exchanges between China and western countries. At present, some translators have laid the foundation for the world to translate China. [6] In order to better publicize China's international image, it still requires the joint efforts of all parties to provide more high-quality English translation texts of government for the world's readers.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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Appendix (Abstract & Keywords in Chinese)

功能对等理论视域下的政府类文本英译方法探究

摘要：随着中国综合国力不断提升，各国政府对我国各方面的动态给予了高度关注。作为中国文化对外传播的一种载体，政府类英译文本是世界了解和学习中国的重要途径之一。尤金·奈达的功能对等理论强调译文与原文在形式和内容上的对应等同。在功能对等理论指导下，笔者从政府类文本翻译实践出发，结合案例分析该类文本翻译特点，探讨翻译实践中的方法和技巧，力求两种语言间达到功能上对等，从而为中国树立良好的国际形象。

关键词：功能对等理论，政府类文本，英译