

# C-E Translation of Political Discourse: Perspective of Faithfulness, Expressiveness and Elegance—A Case Study on the Report of the 19th National Congress of the CPC

Wenmin Li, Ruiqi Li

College of Arts and Sciences, Shaanxi University of Science and Technology, Xi'an, China

Email: 459767619@qq.com

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## Abstract

This paper, by the contrastive case study on Chinese source text and its English version of the report of the 19th national congress of the communist party of China (CPC), means to demonstrate and testify the properness in choice of words and expressions as well as the consistency in meaning with the source in translation from the perspectives of faithfulness, expressiveness and elegance. In general, it is characterized by six parts, namely introduction, the distinctiveness of the political discourse, the Chinese traditional translation theory, the characteristics of the report, the contrastive case study and conclusion.

## Keywords

The Report of the 19th National Congress of the CPC, Perspective of Faithfulness, Expressiveness and Elegance, International Communication, The Contrastive Case Study

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## 1. Introduction

The world's desire to better understand China is gradually intense with the globalization and the rapid development of China in the new era, and China keeps itself open wider to the outside world for better communication with more countries in the world. The Chinese and English bilingual report of the 16th to 19th national congress of the communist party of China is a case in point. Given this context, the translation of Chinese political texts needs to focus on how to make target language readers get the same response to the target language of the

political texts as source language readers do to its source, so as to help the world better understand the role and planning of the Chinese government.

The report of the 19th National Congress of the communist party of China (CPC) is the first time that foreign experts are invited to take part in the translation proofreading, which is of great value as a reference to analyze how to deliver Chinese political discourses with the faithfulness, expressiveness and elegance to the target readers. Based on Yan Fu's theory of faithfulness, expressiveness and elegance, this paper analyzes the translation of some examples from the Chinese and English bilingual report of the 19th National Congress and studies how to translate political reports better with translation techniques.

## 2. The Distinctiveness of the Political Discourse

The political discourse is of high authority of the political government on behalf of the country's position and attitude competing for international discourse power, and it is also of great value and responsibility to establish a friendly relationship with the target readers and construct an accredited international image of the country. Compared to the literary discourse, political discourse prefers to be informative rather than to be metaphorical. What's more, the diplomatic narrative is a preferable methodology often employed in the political discourse, which plays the role of not only an important part of a country's strategic and political narrative but also a profound and long-lasting way of diplomatic communication (Yang & Zhao, 2021). Just as he said, no matter at any stage of growth, China's diplomatic narrative is always accompanied by misinterpretation, misjudgment, smearing and even demonization by some countries or individuals in the west. This is a phenomenon that deserves all circles' attention and profound reflection.

"In contemporary diplomatic activities, diplomatic discourse that can truly reflect the basic concepts of international law and the common values of the international community can be effectively transformed into discourse power to enhance the country's soft power (Xi & Wang, 2017)." At present, the disputes between the East including China and the West on narrative are related to the international discourse power, international competitiveness and national security, the future of globalization and global governance, and the prospect of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation as well (Wang, 2021). Therefore, to make a foreign audience full and accurate understanding of China, the target text should convey the original meaning as appropriately as possible, that is, the text should be accurate, but deviate from, omit, add or subtract meanings at will. The translator's initiative in the process of political texts' translation is also mainly embodied in "expressiveness" and "elegance" by keeping the original style of the political text and polishing it. "Expressiveness" refers to smoothness, which is based on "faithfulness" to further make the target language fluent and express it in a natural way close to the mother tongue. Without sticking to the original form, the target text should be smooth and clear. We should correctly

understand the connotation of the report due to the great difference between Chinese and English, and then accurately translate it in a reasonable way into the target language.

### 3. The Chinese Traditional Translation Theory

The traditional Chinese translation theory recorded may start from the translation of Buddhist sutras, and “faithfulness, expressiveness and elegance” theory (so called FEE afterwards in this paper) can be regarded as one of its peaks (Cui, 2003). The term “FEE” and its translation criteria were put forward by Yan Fu, an enlightenment thinker, translator and educator at later Qing dynasty, in his translation of *Evolution and Ethics* in 1898 (Huxley, 1981). He presented three difficulties in faithfulness, expressiveness and elegance during the process of translation.

“Faithfulness” means that the meaning of the target text cannot be deviated from that of the source text. In other words, nothing should be distorted, omitted, added or subtracted at random in the target text. “Expressiveness” refers to the smooth and clear expression in target language confirming the target readers’ habit of reading rather than sticking to the source language form. “Elegance” refers to the proper choice of words and delicate arrangement of the sentence structure with rhetorical devices in translation process, pursuing the elegance and simplicity of the article itself for ideal reading experience of the target readers. According to Yan Fu, complete faithfulness to the source text both in content and form was thought hard to be achieved in translation. Expressiveness, among the three translation criteria, should be therefore first taken into consideration, for it is the basis for better expression of the translator and ideal communication between the translator and the target readers. Elegance then goes after expressiveness for better reading experience.

Yan Fu’s theory of “FEE” was put forward under the influence of the ancient Buddhist translation thoughts combined together with his practical translation experience, which has made a great contribution to the development of Chinese translation theories. According to Wang Zuoliang, Yan Fu’s “elegance” was closely related to his “faithfulness”. Elegance is not perfection, but an effort to convey something more subtle than the simple meaning of words and sentences, that is, the mental characteristics of the author and the spiritual luster of the source (Wang, 2011). After a systematic analysis of Yan Fu’s translation theory, Wang Hongzhi pointed out that in Yan Fu’s mind, “faithfulness, expressiveness and elegance” are integrated as a whole, and the central point is always the fidelity to the original meaning of the source. “Faithfulness” serves “expressiveness”, and it is also a way to pursue “expressiveness”, rather than an independent translation standard and requirement beyond “Faithfulness” and “expressiveness” (Wang, 2007). At present, a widely accepted interpretation in translation circles is that “faithfulness” means fidelity to the source text, “expressiveness” means fluency and understandability, and “elegance” means well organized struc-

ture of writing (Shen, 1998).

In the translation of political discourse, Yan Fu's "elegance" refers to the use of the style that readers are most willing to accept, so that the target text can be widely circulated, thereby expanding its influence. The translator should pay attention to its position, direction and sensitivity in a political way, especially in the translation of the 19th National Congress Report. The over-literal translation will lead to stiff translation or dead translation, while the extreme of free translation will bring about random translation or guessing translation (Qian, 2005). This paper focuses on the exact transformation of the information, the fluent expression of the target language, and the elegance of the target text with proper choice of words so as to make the political discourse's translation concise and reasonable and acceptable.

#### **4. The Discursive Characteristics of the Report**

The report of the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China is a typical political discourse which reflects the great achievements of socialism with Chinese characteristics in the new era, and defines the new historical position of China. Political discourse is an official document with a formal style, involving national policies, future planning, etc. It is the embodiment of national ideology with communicative and persuasive functions, while it has strong political sensitivity. The C-E translation of the report aims at leading the target readers to better understand and accept the values it conveys. Generally speaking, political text in China has the following two prominent characteristics from the discursive perspective.

##### **4.1. Culture-Loaded Words**

Culture-loaded words refer to those words which best reflect the Chinese cultural information carried by Chinese language and the Chinese social life of human beings in the Chinese language system. These words have no corresponding words in English. Many words with Chinese characteristics in political discourse are created based on China's national conditions, policies and values, such as "四个全面战略布局", "五位一体总布局", "全面建成小康社会" and so on. The translator should analyze the connotations and relevant policies behind these Chinese Characters in order to give accurate English equivalences and achieve faithfulness, expressiveness and elegance in translation practice.

##### **4.2. Parallelism**

This rhetorical device is to put two or more phrases or sentences with the same or similar structure, relevant meaning and the same tone together to form a whole. One of the linguistic characteristics of the report of the Nineteenth National Congress is the use of parallelism in order to strengthen the tone and thus enhance the appealingness of the language. For instance, "We must do more to protect our people's interests, and firmly oppose all moves that damage their in-

terests or put distance between the Party and the people. We must do more to channel our energies toward the contemporary current of reform and innovation, and resolutely address deep-rooted problems. We must do more to safeguard China's sovereignty, security, and development interests, and staunchly oppose all attempts to split China or undermine its ethnic unity and social harmony and stability. We must do more to guard against all kinds of risks, and work determinedly to prevail over every political, economic, cultural, social, and natural difficulty and challenge.”

## 5. The Application of the “FEE” to the Translation of the Report

The report of the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China embodies the great achievements of socialism with Chinese characteristics in the new era, and clarifies the new historical position of China. It is an important political discourse to show our country's image and to spread China's voice to the world. This paper, by analysis of the cases from the translated text of the report, focuses on the accuracy in choice of words and the smooth expressions as well as the elegance of the target text under the application of the “FEE”.

### 5.1. To Be Accurate and Faithful

The report of the Nineteenth National Congress plays a prominent role in transmitting the economic, political and social development of our country. Therefore, the information of the source discourse needs to be accurately conveyed through the translation. At the same time, as a serious political discourse, the translation must be closely faithful to the source text. The translation of political discourse should put “faithfulness” in the first place.

#### Example 1

ST: 农业农村农民问题是关系国计民生的根本性问题，必须始终把解决好“三农”问题作为全党工作重中之重。

TT: Issues relating to agriculture, rural areas, and rural people are fundamental to China as they directly concern our country's stability and our people's well-being.

Analysis: The translation of this example is in line with the “Faithfulness” translation theory. Faithfulness means that the translator must be faithful to the source discourse. In this case, the Chinese character “三” in “三农”问题, the short phrase underlined in the source text means the number “three” in English, and the Chinese phrase “问题” means “issues” in plural due to the number three. The Chinese phrase “三农”, which is familiar to Chinese people but new to people of native English, is actually an abbreviation of “农业”, “农村” and “农民” which mean the three aspects of agriculture, rural areas, and rural people. And “三农”问题, a noun phrase in Chinese, is therefore translated into English short phrase issues relating to agriculture, rural areas, and rural people, which will be better understood by the target readers. According to this case, the trans-

lator, in order to accurately convey the information represented by the word, chooses the explanation translation method, which makes the target text faithful to the source in both the surface and the deep meaning, and the degree of faithfulness is determined by the translation purpose and the translator's understanding of the source. Such translation demonstrates and testifies the accuracy and faithfulness to the source text.

#### Example 2

ST: 为贯彻十八大精神，党中央召开七次全会，分别就政府机构改革和职能转变、全面深化改革、全面推进依法治国、制定“十三五”规划、全面从严治党等重大问题作出决定和部署。

TT: To put the guiding principles from our 18th National Congress into action, the Party Central Committee has held seven plenary sessions. There, decisions and plans were made on issues of major importance, from reforming the institutions and transforming the functions of government to deepening reform in all areas, advancing law-based governance, formulating the 13th Five-Year Plan, and seeing governance over the Party is exercised fully and with rigor.

Analysis: The translation of this example is in line with the “Faithfulness” translation theory. In this case, “13th Five-Year Plan” is a unique development plan in China. What is the content of the plan is not reflected in the translation, but the translation clearly shows that this is the “thirteenth five year plan”, which is different from “12th Five-Year”. As for the content of the plan, we need to know a lot of social and cultural backgrounds in order to understand it. But in the process of translation, the name of the plan is conveyed to the target readers, which is easy for the target readers to understand and meets the requirements of faithfulness to the source discourse. Such translation demonstrates the properness and faithfulness in choice of the word.

#### Example 3

ST: 全面准确贯彻“一国两制”方针，牢牢掌握宪法和基本法赋予的中央对香港、澳门全面管治权，深化内地和港澳地区交流合作，保持香港、澳门繁荣稳定。

TT: We have fully and faithfully implemented the principle of “one country, two systems,” and ensured that the central government exercises its overall jurisdiction over Hong Kong and Macao as mandated by China's Constitution and the basic laws of the two special administrative regions.

Analysis: The translation of this word conforms to the “Faithfulness” translation principle, making the translation concise and lively, while retaining the unique charm of Chinese cultural words. This word in the reports of the 19th National Congress is a typical culture-loaded word. As is shown in the target text, the translation is not only faithful to the content of the source discourse, but also retains the form of the source discourse. “One country, two systems” is the meaning of two systems in a country. In English, it is translated into “one country, two systems”, which accurately conveys the cultural information contained in the word.

## 5.2. To Be Smooth

“Expressiveness” means that the translation should be smooth, and the meaning of the translation can be understood by the target readers. In the process of the translation of the 19th National Congress report, we should pay attention to conveying the deep meaning of some contents in the report. If the translator sticks rigidly to the form of the source language and translates literally into Chinese without comprehending the specific meaning, the target text will inevitably be insipid, which can neither express the meaning nor spread the national image and rich connotation of the source discourse to the world. Therefore, the translator of political discourses must pursue the “expressiveness” translation on the basis of the “faithfulness”, so as to transmit the Chinese voice more effectively to the world.

### Example 4

ST: 深入贯彻以人民为中心的发展思想，一大批惠民举措落地实施，人民获得感显著增强。脱贫攻坚战取得决定性进展，六千多万贫困人口稳定脱贫，贫困发生率从百分之十点二下降到百分之四以下。

TT: Our vision of making development people-centered has been acted on, a whole raft of initiatives to benefit the people has seen implementation, and the people’s sense of fulfillment has grown stronger. Decisive progress has been made in the fight against poverty: more than 60 million people have been lifted out of poverty, and the poverty headcount ratio has dropped from 10.2 percent to less than 4 percent.

Analysis: In this case, “脱贫攻坚” is typical of Chinese four characters for rhetorical effect of emphasis in meaning and cadence in tone, in which “脱” and “攻” are synonyms of verb to each other, and so are “贫” and “艰” as a noun. “脱” and “攻” are translated into one word of noun “fight”, and “贫” and “艰” one word of noun “poverty”, which is in line with the “Expressiveness” translation theory. “Expressiveness” concerns more about the target readers, making the target text conform to the culture of the target language as far as possible for the target readers’ better understanding of the original meaning from the source text. The target text reflects the difficulty of fighting against poverty in a concise way. Under the guidance of “Expressiveness” translation theory, this process is vividly expressed, reproducing the strength and momentum of “eliminating poverty” and focusing on the reproduction of context rather than the equivalence of parts of speech and the numbers of words, which is more conducive to the strategy of target readers’ understanding.

### Example 5

ST: 五年来，我们勇于面对党面临的重大风险考验和党内存在的突出问题，以顽强意志品质正风肃纪、反腐惩恶。

TT: Over the past five years, we have acted with courage to confront major risks and tests facing the Party and to address prominent problems within the Party itself. With firm resolve, we have tightened discipline and improved Party conduct.

Analysis: As is shown in the example, “正风肃纪” and “反腐惩恶” like “脱贫攻坚” in the above example, are typical of Chinese four characters. The synonyms of the corresponding pairs of verbs “正” and “肃”, and “反” and “惩” are respectively expressed as verbs like “tightened” and “improved” in English, while the synonyms of the corresponding pairs of nouns “风” and “纪”, and “腐” and “恶” the nouns like “discipline” and “Party conduct”. Such expressions are both concise in meaning and close to the usage habits of target readers, which is in line with the “Expressiveness” translation theory.

### 5.3. To Be Elegant

As mentioned earlier, “elegance” refers to the proper choice of words in translation and the pursuit of elegance and conciseness. In the translation of the 19th National Congress report, the pursuit of “elegance” is always next to “faithfulness” and “expressiveness”. If the pursuit of “elegance” makes the translation of political discourse inaccurate, then “elegance” should be given up.

#### Example 6

ST: 鸦片战争后, 中国陷入内忧外患的黑暗境地, 中国人民经历了战乱频仍、山河破碎、民不聊生的深重苦难。

TT: But with the Opium War of 1840, China was plunged into the darkness of domestic turmoil and foreign aggression; its people, ravaged by war, saw their homeland torn apart and lived in poverty and despair.

Analysis: The use of three- or four-character idioms is very common in Chinese. The choice of words in translation such Chinese idioms matters most for not only keeping consistent with the accuracy and standardization of the political requirement and also the expressive effect. Three past participles as “ravaged by war” modifying the subject of the sentence “its people”, and “torn apart” and “lived in poverty and despair” modifying the object “their homeland”, are employed in the translation. Such choice of words and their forms is concise in form and exact in meaning and vivid in expression, which strikes a responsive chord in the hearts of its target readers. This translation is in line with the “Elegance” translation theory on the basis of ensuring faithfulness and expressiveness to the source text.

## 6. Conclusion

The report of the 19th National Congress is of great significance in politics, ideology, theory and practice. Based on Yan Fu’s “FEE” theory, this paper takes the 19th report as an example. It is found that under the guidance of Yan Fu’s translation theory, the translation of political discourses can pursue expressiveness and elegance on the basis of faithfulness. Therefore, in the translation of political discourses, we should clarify the purpose and audience of translation, and accurately convey the information of the source discourse under the guidance of “FEE” translation theory, so as to make the world better understand China and vice versa. Political report is a highly concise summary of China’s complex na-



tional conditions, policies and values. Many words and terms have profound political connotations behind them. Therefore, it is very important to make the translation meet the “FEE” translation criteria. Therefore, in the process of translation, the translator should first fully investigate and understand the historical significance, Chinese national conditions and political connotations contained in the source discourse, so as to make the translated text faithful to the source discourse. Secondly, in the translation of political discourses, attention should be paid to the choice of native English expressions, so that English readers can better accept and understand them, and the translation can be smooth in the content or form of language. Finally, translation needs to pursue graceful translation criteria as far as possible.

### Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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