

English Translation of Political Documents with Chinese Characteristics from the Perspective of Eco-Translatology

-- A Case Study of the Report on the Work of the Government (2023)

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Abstract. In today's increasingly globalized world, foreign publicity is particularly important in the exchanges and cooperation between nations, among which the translation of political documents serves as a crucial channel. The Report on the Work of the Government summarizes China's work over the past year and outlines the prospects for the coming year. Its English translation is often highly concerned both domestically and internationally, making it an important text for foreign publicity. Based on the theory of Eco-translatology, this study takes the English version of the Report on the Work of the Government (2023) as an example to explore how to highlight cultural confidence and achieve communicative purposes in the translation of foreign publicity represented by political documents. It is found that translators often employ translation strategies, such as free translation, addition, omission, combination and annotation to realize the adaptive selection of translation in linguistic, culture and communication, facilitating full interaction between the source and target cultures, thereby enhancing the international influence and dissemination power of Chinese discourse.

Keywords: Report on the Work of the Government; Eco-translatology; Three-dimensional Transformations; Translation Strategy.

1. Introduction

In the increasingly globalized world, exchanges and cooperation between nations have become particularly important. In this context, as a crucial medium for cultural and informational exchange, foreign publicity plays an indispensable role with its distinct ideational nature, and extensive mass characters, exerting immense communicative power, influence, and endless creativity. The *Report on the Work of the Government* (hereinafter referred to as the *Report*) is of great significance to China's economy, politics, culture as well as many other aspects. Its contents include a summary of the work in the past year, an analysis of the current national situations and issues, a guide for the country's future plans, and a statement to the people of the nation. An accurate translation of the *Report* from the perspective of Eco-translatology is helpful for China to self-shape the image of a great power, correcting misperceptions created by others, and safeguarding national interests. At present, most of the domestic political document translation studies are based on corpus construction, domestication, foreignization and so on, with few studies investigating it from the perspective of Eco-translatology.

Eco-translatology is a translation theory proposed by Hu Gengshen, which applies ecological rationality to provide a holistic study of translation from an ecological perspective. From the perspective of Eco-translatology, we can not only better address the language and cultural problems in the text, but also deeply comprehend and convey the underlying meanings and cultural values behind Chinese political documents. Therefore, this study is crucial for improving the quality of English translation of Chinese political documents, promoting international exchanges and cooperation, and contributing to a comprehensive global understanding of China. This paper examines the English translation strategies of the *Report (2023)* from linguistic, cultural and communicative perspectives, aiming to provide a feasible direction and aid the development of the political document translation research from the perspective of Eco-translatology.

2. Literature Review

In 2001, Hu Gengshen first put forward the concept of Eco-translatology. Hu (2004) stated that Eco-translatology was based on Darwin's theory of evolution, incorporating ecological concepts such as selection, adaptation, survival of the fittest, and ecological environment. Therefore, the essence of translation can be regarded as the translator's adaptation and selection between the source and target language ecological environments. The translation ecological environment refers to the world presented by the original text, the source language and the target language, encompassing language, communication, culture, society, as well as authors, readers, and clients in an interconnected and interactive whole (Hu, 2004). According to the theory of Eco-translatology, translators should adapt to the translation ecological environment, focusing on the three-dimensional transformation method, that is, linguistic, cultural, and communicative dimensions, under the principle of multi-dimensional adaptations and adaptive selections.

Meanwhile, Eco-translatology is not limited to theoretical discussions, it has also been applied extensively in various fields of texts, such as literature and foreign publicity. For example, on the translation of foreign publicity, Chen and Xu (2019) took the English translation of President Xi Jinping's speech at the opening ceremony of the China International Import Expo (CIIE) as an example to analyse the translation compensation of foreign publicity texts from the perspective of Eco-translatology. The translation of publicity texts is a unique type of translation, embodying both the attributes of publicity and translation. Researchers have discovered that translating such materials required selective interpretation rather than a verbatim reproduction of the text. When it involves politically sensitive issues, translators should euphemistically translate or omit based on the context, actively applying subjective initiative. It is crucial to comprehensively consider the language content, cultural context, and communicative intent of the text, aiming to satisfy the requirements of all parties to the greatest extent. By adopting translation strategies suitable for the target ecological environment, the loss of information in linguistic, cultural, and communicative dimensions can be effectively compensated.

To sum up, although the relevant applied research of Eco-translatology has been widely carried out, there is a limited number of studies on the translation research of political texts. Therefore, from the perspective of Eco-translatology, this paper applies the three-dimensional transformations (i.e., linguistic, cultural, and communicative dimensions) to deeply analyze the English translation strategies of the *Report (2023)*. The aim is to enrich the research on the translation of political documents, help construct China's foreign discourse system, build a positive image of China in the new era, and allow the world to understand China better.

3. Political Document

Political document is a category of authoritative literature, involving national policies, interests, image, and political influence. It mainly consists of two types of works: one is official documents and government work reports, and the other is political commentaries. The following will briefly expound on the unique characteristics of political documents in language, content, and style.

3.1. Characteristics of Political Documents

The language characteristics of political documents are reflected in the accuracy and authority of words and sentences. They are often blended with rich elements of Chinese traditional culture, such as idioms and allusions, as well as unique political terms and expressions. This requires translators not only to be proficient in languages but also to have a deep understanding of the cultural differences between the East and the West to ensure the accuracy and cultural adaptability of the translation. In terms of syntactic structure, compared to the concise sentence patterns in English, political documents often contain longer sentences and avoid using the first person directly to enhance the objectivity and formality of the text.

Political documents typically cover politics, economy, culture and other aspects of a country, offering comprehensive content. These documents not only review past achievements, but also put forward future development goals and plans. The content of political documents has a strong timeliness, with annual updates reflecting the current socio-political climate and national development needs, incorporating new concepts and strategies. The style of political documents shows the characteristics of formality and accessibility, emphasizing specific policy focuses while expressing care for people. Although the content is serious, the style is approachable by using various rhetorical devices, such as parallelism, repetition and antithesis to enhance the expressiveness and appeal of the text.

3.2. The Importance of English Translation of the Report

The enhancement of China's comprehensive strength has continuously increased its international influence. Each year, the *Report*, as a programmatic document, plays a vital role in summarizing and planning the domestic development and policy direction. Simultaneously, the *Report* is also an important access to show China's developmental achievements and ideas to the world, so its English version has become a key source of information for outsiders to understand China's politics, economy, diplomacy, and other fields. The translation of leaders' works enables international audiences to better understand China, thereby fostering cooperation between nations. As an authoritative political discourse issued by the State Council Information Office, the English version of the *Report* directly affects the world's understanding of China's principles and policies. The fundamental purpose of political documents is to win audiences, provide rational explanations and strong defenses for China's path, system and development model, and guide foreign audiences to accurately interpret China and dialectically view the world, thus consolidating China's ideological discourse power. The English version of the *Report*, as a model of government document translation for external publicity, demonstrates the characteristics of political publicity texts. It accurately introduces China's national conditions, policies and other key information to foreign audiences, serving as an important way for the international community to understand China.

4. An Analysis of the English Version of the Report (2023) from the Perspective of Three-Dimensional Transformations

4.1. Linguistic Dimension

The adaptive selection and transformation in linguistic dimension refers to the translator's adaptive selection and transformation regarding language information, part of speech, language forms and syntactic structure during the translation process (Hu, 2006). Although there is homogeneity between the source language and the translation, heterogeneity also exists, and different language characteristics lead to different expressions. English belongs to Indo-European language family, while Chinese belongs to Sino-Tibetan language family. English pays attention to hypotaxis, while Chinese emphasizes parataxis. Therefore, after understanding the translation ecological environment, the translator should select and adjust the vocabulary of the target language when necessary to fit that of the source language and transform its language forms (Xiong, 2011), aiming to achieve the best integrated adaptive selection degree. This paper will analyze the adaptation of the *Report(2023)* in linguistic dimension from the lexical and syntactic levels.

4.1.1. Lexical Level

(1) Part of Speech Conversion

Example (1):

Source language: ...引导金融机构增加信贷投放, 降低融资成本,...

Target language: We provided guidance to financial institutions on increasing credit supply and lowering financing costs.

In terms of part of speech, English favors nouns while Chinese prefers verbs. In the English translation of the *Report*, many words that are verbs in Chinese are translated into nouns in English to better adapt to the target language's ecological environment. For instance, the Chinese verb “引导(guide)” aims to emphasize that the state should guide financial institutions to increase credit issuance and reduce financing costs. In translation, the translator flexibly changes the source verb “引导(guide)” to the target noun “guidance”. This not only aligns with the English preference for using noun to describe actions and policies, but also clearly expresses the government's role as providing guidance and suggestions, rather than direct execution or command, which is conducive to accurately conveying the intention and context of the original text.

(2) Omission of Category Words

Example (2)

Source language: 建立健全防止返贫动态监测和帮扶机制，有力应对疫情、灾情等不利影响，确保不发生规模性返贫。

Target language: We established effective monitoring and assistance mechanisms to prevent people lifted out of poverty from relapsing into poverty and took robust action in response to natural disasters and COVID-19 to forestall any large-scale relapse into poverty.

Lexically, Chinese prefers repetition, while English emphasizes conciseness (Liu 2020). English translation often adopts ellipsis, a strategy of omitting non-essential information to highlight main information. In this translation, the translator omits the “negative influence(不利影响)” without compromising the original meaning and the fluency of the translation, thus effectively avoiding lengthy sentences. If translated word for word, it would lead to overlapping of meanings and mixed sentences, which is not conducive to conveying effective information. Therefore, employing ellipsis meets the communicative needs of readers.

4.1.2. Syntactic Level

(1) Subjectless Sentence

The characteristic of the subjectless sentence is that it only has a predicate and no subject, representing a unique expression style inherent to Chinese, which often appears in the *Report*. Subjectless sentences will not cause comprehension difficulties in Chinese. In contrast, English typically follows a subject-verb structure and seldom uses subjectless sentences. Therefore, to avoid misunderstandings when translating, it is necessary to add a subject or convert the sentence into a passive voice to adapt to English linguistic conventions.

Example (3):

Source language: 依法保护民营企业产权和企业家权益，鼓励支持民营经济和民营企业发展壮大，支持中小微企业和个体工商户发展。

Target language: We should, in accordance with the law, protect the property rights of private enterprises and the rights and interests of entrepreneurs.

When translating, the translator could discern from the context that the omitted subject of the sentence is the Chinese government. The English translation is intended for foreign readers, so adding the subject “we” can highlight the attitude of the discourse, making the efforts made by the Chinese government more salient. This allows the target readers to fully understand the meaning of the original language based on the complete sentence structure.

(2) Parallel Structure

Parallel structure refers to a sentence pattern composed of linguistic units with the same or similar grammatical structures, which is a common rhetorical device characterized by clarity and coherence, and is often used to list views, facts, events and so on. Chinese attaches great importance to parataxis,

often adopting parallel structures for aesthetic neatness. By contrast, English values the harmony of form and does not pursue uniformity in structure and syllables, focusing more on using a variety of expressions. Therefore, when translating parallel structures from Chinese to English, synonymous substitution can be adopted to avoid repetition.

Example (4):

Source language: 我们要坚定奉行独立自主的和平外交政策，坚定不移走和平发展道路，坚持在和平共处五项原则基础上同各国发展友好合作。

Target language: We should stay committed to an independent foreign policy of peace and to peaceful development and pursue friendship and cooperation with other countries on the basis of the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence.

In this sentence, “we” refers to the Chinese government, and the sentences following the three instances of “坚持” demonstrate “our” determination to work. The parallel structure is used to list opinions. Faced with the same Chinese expression, the translator first understands the logical relationship between the original texts and converts the first two “坚持” into one, translating it as “stay committed”. To avoid repetition, the third “坚持” is translated as “pursue”, which enriches the expression and makes the political document less rigid and monotonous, conveying the original meaning of the text.

4.2. Cultural Dimension

The adaptive selection and transformation in cultural dimension refers to the translator’s need to pay close attention to the cultural differences between the source and target languages during the translation process. Properly handling cultural differences in literary translation can improve the quality of translations, convey cultural connotations, and enable readers to fully understand the cultural context of the source language (Mi & Mi, 2023). Based on an in-depth understanding of China’s characteristic words, how to accurately translate them into other languages is a major challenge for translators. Wang (2020) classified China’s characteristic words into five categories, which are proper nouns, abbreviations, idioms, allusions and figurative words, and analyzed the corresponding translation strategies, respectively (Wang, 2020). Based on this perspective, this paper mainly discusses the adaptive selection and transformation of English versions in cultural dimension from the aspects of proper nouns, abbreviations, idioms, allusions, and figurative words emerging in the *Report (2023)*.

4.2.1. Proper noun

Table 1. Proper nouns and the English translations in the 2023 *Report*

Source language	Target language
十四五规划	the 14 th Five-Year Plan
义务教育	compulsory education
小康	moderate prosperity
脱贫攻坚战	the critical battle against poverty
乡村振兴	rural revitalization
信访	public complaints
扫黑除恶	combat organized crime
双拥	mutual support between civilian sectors and the military
新发展理念	new development philosophy

Proper nouns refer to specific people, objects, places, institutions, organizations, systems and so on (Wang, 2020). The English translation of such expressions primarily employs literal translation and literal translation with annotations, but there are also examples of free translation. Table 1 lists the proper nouns in the *Report (2023)* and their English translations. The following analysis takes “小康” as an example to explore the translation strategies for proper nouns.

The term “moderate prosperity” originates from ancient Chinese philosophy and political thought, particularly from the description of an ideal social state in Confucianism. It primarily refers to a moderately affluent lifestyle enjoyed by the vast masses, situated between basic subsistence and wealth, with per capita gross domestic product (GDP) as a reference standard. Eco-translatology emphasizes maintaining an ecological balance between the source and target languages during the translation process. Since the expression “小康” does not have a direct cultural counterpart in English, translating it as “moderate prosperity” not only retains the original meaning, but also makes it understandable within an English context, spreading the Chinese cultural features embedded in proper nouns to English readers as well.

4.2.2. Abbreviation

Abbreviations refer to language units that can be freely used after the original vocabulary is abbreviated or omitted. Abbreviations are highly characteristic of Chinese, which primarily serve to simplify components and refine the essence. Abbreviations can not only avoid lengthy narratives, but also facilitate readers’ memory, which is conducive to the wide dissemination of the *Report*. Due to the prevalence of polysemy in Chinese, translators should refer to the full names of abbreviations before translation and translate them in combination with the context to avoid misunderstanding (Wang, 2020).

Example (5):

Source language: 加强重要能源、矿产资源国内勘探开发和增储上产。

Target language: We should redouble efforts to explore and develop important energy and mineral resources, discover more reserves, and boost production.

The abbreviation “增储上产” is translated into “discover more reserves, and boost production”. This Chinese expression is concise and rich in meaning, however, this requires a more detailed explanation for non-native Chinese speakers. In this context, the translator fully understands the background and the original meaning of the terms and adopts additional translation. The translation of “增(increase)” into “discover” does not alter the original part of speech, and “boost” translates “上(up)” from a directional noun to a verb is a common practice in Chinese to English translation, which ensures that the original intent and information are accurately understood and conveyed across different linguistic and cultural contexts.

4.2.3. Idiom

Idioms are long-standing fixed expressions in Chinese. They are generally derived from ancient classics, historical stories, or oral legends. Most of them adopt a four-character structure that is elegant and dignified, enhancing the aesthetic and appreciative value of the *Report*. Idiom is a unique expression in Chinese and a distinct cultural symbol inherent to China, constituting cases of complete cultural non-correspondence. When translating Chinese idioms, in order to preserve the original meaning, translators usually opt for direct translation. If an expression with a completely equivalent meaning can be found in the target language, it should be applied through borrowing translation. With respect to the idioms that cannot be directly translated, they need to be translated adaptively based on the actual linguistic context.

Example (6):

Source language: 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， ...

Target language: 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 idiom “风高浪急” is used to describe situations that are extremely tense or difficult. In the context of example (6), this idiom is utilized to depict the complexity and arduousness of the international situation. The translation “high winds and choppy water” metaphorically uses natural storms to represent complex and challenging circumstances, which retains the original idiom’s imagery. This is a relatively common metaphor in English, so it resonates well with English readers. The translation adapts to the culture and expression of the target language, thus effectively conveying the original meaning and emotional tone.

4.2.4. Allusion

Allusions refer to phrases with origins in ancient poetry, historical stories, and other sources, which are closely related to China’s traditional culture and historical background. These phrases are rooted in Chinese traditional culture or related to certain historical periods of China and often cause confusion among foreign readers. If improperly handled in translation, they will not only fail to achieve effective dissemination of Chinese culture but can even backfire, leading to readers’ misunderstandings of the source language (Wang, 2020).

Example (7):

Source language: 十年来我国居民消费价格涨幅稳定在 2%左右的较低水平，成如容易却艰辛。

Target language: For the past decade, CPI increases in China have been kept at a comparatively low level of around 2 percent. The difficulty of such an achievement should not be underestimated.

The poem “成如容易却艰辛” comes from “题张司业诗” by Wang Anshi in Song Dynasty, meaning that although achievements seem easy, there are tremendous effort and hardship behind it. Premier Li Keqiang cited this allusion to express the difficulties and challenges in maintaining stable prices in China over the past decade. In the English translation, considering that the target language readers might not be familiar with Chinese idioms, the translator adopts the liberal translation to emphasize the challenges and difficulties China has faced. This approach clearly conveys the main points of the poem, makes it easier for readers to understand, and faithfully retains the original text’s main information and emotional tone.

4.2.5. Figurative Words

Figurative words contain metaphorical rhetoric, offering vivid and lively expressions that are easily understood by foreign readers. Some Chinese metaphors can find equivalent imagery in English culture while many metaphorical expressions carry strong Chinese characteristics and cannot find that. In such cases, it is necessary to translate them in light of China’s actual conditions.

Example (8):

Source language: 既帮助企业渡过难关、留得青山，也放水养鱼、涵养税源， ...

Target language: This policy not only helped enterprises overcome difficulties and stay afloat, but also nurtured business growth and cultivated sources of tax revenue.

The phrase “放水养鱼(nurtured business growth)” implies that to develop a certain endeavor, investment is necessary to create a favorable environment for its growth, in this case referring to supporting business development. This Chinese idiom with metaphorical meaning vividly illustrates the concept, but it may be challenging for non-native Chinese speakers to comprehend. Therefore, translators have rendered it as “nurture business growth” in the *Report*, directly conveying the metaphor. This translation strategy ensures that the original meaning can be effectively conveyed across different languages and cultural backgrounds through simplified and direct expression.

4.3. Communicative Dimension

The adaptive selection and transformation in the communicative dimension require translators to focus not only on the linguistic features of the source and target languages, but also on the communicative intention (Liu & Wang, 2021). Numeric abbreviations are phrases with Chinese political characteristics. This expression is entirely absent in English culture, so the role of the communicative dimension in the translation process is crucial. Numeric abbreviations are composed of numbers and abbreviations, which are highly summarizing and often used to concisely summarize national policies, so they can convey rich information in limited text space and avoid verbosity. Their meanings are often abstract, and translators need to deeply understand the full forms and implications of these abbreviations. When translating numerical abbreviations, a simple verbatim translation may lead to a loss of information, making it difficult for target language readers to grasp the deep connotations. To ensure the translation accurately conveys the original meaning, translators should employ various strategies such as direct translation, direct translation with annotations and free translation, while also considering the adaptive selection and transformation in communicative dimension. This allows the translated text to accurately convey the cultural connotations and cross-cultural factors of the original, fully realizing the communicative intent.

Example (9):

Source language: ...增强“四个意识”、坚定“四个自信”、做到“两个维护”,...

Target language: ...enhanced their consciousness of the need to maintain political integrity, think in big-picture terms, follow the leadership core, and keep in alignment with the central Party leadership; stayed confident in the path, theory, system, and culture of socialism with Chinese characteristics; upheld Comrade Xi Jinping's core position on the Party Central Committee and in the Party as a whole and upheld the Central Committee's authority and its centralized, unified leadership...

In this sentence, the translator adopts an amplification strategy, instead of translating “四个意识” “四个自信” “两个维护” as “Four Consciousnesses” “Four-sphere Confidence” and “Two Upholds”. Although the translation does not contain numbers, it is clearer and more intuitive, skillfully achieving an adaptive transformation between the communicative dimensions of the original text and the translation.

5. Conclusion

From the perspective of Eco-translatology, this paper uses the three-dimensional transformations of language, culture, and communication as entry points to analyze the English translation of the *Report (2023)*. It is found that translators often employ translation strategies such as free translation, additional translation, omission, combination and annotation to achieve the balance between the original and the target texts in the translation ecological environment. These approaches promote the full communication between the source and the target cultures, with a view to providing valuable references and insights for future research in the field of political document translation. Political document is characterized by politics, safety and timeliness. Translators should possess profound political theoretical knowledge, linguistic skills, and cross-cultural communication abilities to ensure that the translation is faithful to the original meaning and adapts to the needs of the target readers. Moreover, the translation of political documents demands that translators have a prudent and sensitive political awareness to ensure the political accuracy and sensitivity of the text. Therefore, this paper aims to offer feasible directions for the study of political document translation from the perspective of Eco-translatology, and help the further development of political document translation research and political text publicity.

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