

An Analysis of the English Translation of Chinese External Propaganda Texts in the Ecological Translation Perspective: A Case Study of the Written Speech “Harmony in Unity, Jointly Facing Challenges, Composing a New Chapter of Asia-Pacific Cooperation”

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The paper, taking “Harmony in Unity, Jointly Facing Challenges, Composing a New Chapter of Asia-Pacific Cooperation” as the case, focuses on the English translation of Chinese external propaganda texts from the perspective of three-dimensions theory of ecological translation. The analysis aims to contribute to a better English version of the written speech and help achieve effective communication on the international stage, fostering a positive dissemination effect that enhances global understanding of China and, in turn, promotes internationally friendly exchanges and cooperation.

Keywords: three dimensions, ecological translation, English translation, Chinese external propaganda texts

Introduction

The world is undergoing significant changes unseen in a century, with the rise of emerging market forces and the need for adjustments in the international system. At the same time, there is a growing trend of anti-globalization, protectionism, and unilateralism. The United States has initiated trade frictions with major economies, including China, and there is an increase in both traditional and non-traditional security issues. Against this backdrop, hosting the Import Expo showcases China’s determination, confidence, courage, and responsibility in expanding its openness, demonstrating China’s sincerity in mutually beneficial cooperation and joint development with the world. As a crucial window for China’s opening up to the outside world, the Import Expo has become a significant platform for global economic and trade exchanges and cooperation.

The translation of promotional news about the Import Expo is crucial for informing friends worldwide about the grand event. Promotional news is important in promoting information dissemination and facilitating international communication. One of the focal points of academic research is how to accurately convey news information from the source language to the target language regarding language, culture, and communication.

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From the perspective of ecological translation studies, promotional texts refer to the translation process guided by ecological translation theory, fully considering the ecological environment of the source text and the target text and maintaining an ecological balance between the language, culture, and society of the source and target texts, to achieve the sustainable development of translation activities.

Suppose the translation of promotional texts contains a series of issues such as grammatical inaccuracies and non-standard usage. In that case, it may have an impact on China's international image to some extent and hinder cultural exchanges between China and other countries. This article takes a written speech at the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Business Leaders' Summit as an example to analyze the English translation of promotional news from three dimensions of ecological translation studies.

Ecological Translation

Theoretical Foundation

Ecological translation, initially proposed by Professor Hu Gengshen in China, represents a novel approach to translation research. Rooted in Eastern ecological wisdom, this discipline views and studies translation from the perspective of "ecological balance". It encompasses the appropriate translation based on the respective culture and delves into the ecological significance and rationality embedded in translated texts. Ecological translation studies primarily explore the interrelationship between translators and the translation ecological environment, describing the overall translation ecology and the essence of translation theory using the paradigm of ecological translation.

Emphasizing ecological balance in translation, it posits that translation involves transplanting a text from one language ecosystem to another. Translators are tasked with adapting, selecting, transforming, and reconstructing the translation ecological environment, maintaining harmony and balance between the original text's ecology and the translated text's ecology. The discipline is underpinned by three main concepts: "Translation as Text Transplantation", "Translation as Adaptive Selection", and "Translation as Ecological Balance". These notions comprehensively cover various aspects of translation, including the translated text, the individuals engaged in translation, and the translation environment.

In ecological translation studies, a foundational theory is the "Translation Adaptive Selection Theory". This theory primarily investigates and analyzes the similarities and connections between translation as a human activity and the natural law of "survival of the fittest". Guided by this theory, we continually explore and understand how translators adapt and select within the "translation ecological environment", examining the intrinsic connections, fundamental characteristics, and underlying patterns within these actions.

This theory extensively details and constructs an adaptive selection theory that centers around translators and involves multiple factors. In ecological translation studies, the translation methodology can be briefly summarized as "three-dimensional transformation". This implies that translators, during the translation process, must adapt to the ecological environment of translation and the interactive effects of language, culture, and communication. Grounded in the original text, translators read and comprehend it, considering the ecological environment of the target language, exercising their subjectivity, and integrating a highly adaptively selective translation.

Ecological Translation Studies and Public Diplomacy Texts

In the translation process of written speeches during the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Summit, ecological translation studies emphasize the three-dimensional transformation, encompassing the

dimensions of language, culture, and communication. These three dimensions are interrelated during translation, requiring comprehensive consideration and selection from multiple perspectives.

On the language dimension, language translation should fully consider “interchangeability” to ensure accuracy, fluency, and adaptive selection of various linguistic attributes and expressions. On the cultural dimension, translation should grasp the cultural environment from a cultural perspective, emphasizing the transmission and transformation of cultural connotations. On the communication dimension, the translation process of written speeches should focus on the adaptive selection of communicative intentions, ensuring that the translated work can achieve the communicative purposes of the original text in the target language.

In summary, the three-dimensional principles of ecological translation studies emphasize multidimensional adaptive selection and transformation during the translation process. This ensures the accuracy, fluency, and cultural adaptability of translated works in the context of public diplomacy texts.

Three-Dimensional Transformation of the Written Speech “Concerted Efforts, Facing Challenges Together, Composing a New Chapter of Asia-Pacific Cooperation”

Adaptive Transformation in the Linguistic Dimension

Hu Gengshen asserts that adaptive selection in the linguistic dimension involves the translator making adaptive and selective transformations in various aspects and levels of language form during translation. Given the significant differences between Chinese and English in grammar, textual rhetoric, sentence structure, and voice expression, the translator should adaptively select language elements from different perspectives, striving to produce a translation that better fits the bilingual language environment of Chinese and English.

Example 1: “The questions of the world, of history, and of the times”.

Analysis: In the process of linguistic transformation, the existing translation version needs to adequately convey the original text’s use of parallelism. Translating it as “The question of the world, of history, and of the times” fails to capture the urgency of “the question” in today’s context. Simultaneously, it overlooks the strong momentum and rhythmic sense conveyed repeating “之问” three times in the original Chinese text. However, a more accurate and precise translation would be “The questions of the world, the questions of history, the questions of the times”. This not only achieves a formal echo of the parallelism in the Chinese original but also, while enhancing the rhythmic cadence of the translation, accurately expresses the original text’s positive attitude of Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) member countries in dealing with numerous issues post-Cold War.

Example 2: “To make a moat of one’s neighbors”.

Analysis: The Chinese idiom “以邻为壑”, originating from *Mencius—Gaozi Xia*, originally meant using neighboring countries as a large drainage ditch, diverting one’s floods to the neighboring country. It later extended to signify pursuing one’s interests while shifting difficulties or disasters onto other nations. In the original context, this idiom can be understood as an economic policy where a country attempts to alleviate its economic issues by worsening the economic problems of other nations. Due to the profound cultural connotations of this idiom, the English translation process necessitates careful consideration of linguistic and cultural contexts. In English-speaking countries, a term with a similar meaning is “a beggar-thy-neighbor”. This term, coined by philosopher and economist Adam Smith in “The Wealth of Nations”, criticizes trade protectionism, stating, “Their interest is beggaring all their neighbors”. Finding equivalent terms in both Chinese and English languages helps avoid inaccuracies in language conversion, ensuring the translated text is more readable. This approach allows readers of the translation to comprehend the original text better, maximizing the reception of its conveyed

meaning.

Adaptive Transformation in the Cultural Dimension

Adaptive selection and transformation in the cultural dimension involve the translator focusing on transmitting and interpreting bilingual cultural connotations. Domestication and foreignization are common translation strategies in the cultural dimension. External propaganda texts often contain cultural-loaded terms specific to the source language, requiring the translator to choose between domesticating or foreignizing strategies.

Example 3: “All things thrive with their roots, and all endeavors prosper with the right path”.

Analysis: The Chinese expression “万物得其本者生，百事得其道者成”，from Liu Xiang’s *Shuo Yuan* during the Western Han Dynasty, conveys the idea that all things in the world can only thrive if their fundamental aspects are preserved, and all endeavors can only succeed if they align with the righteous path. When citing this proverb in the written speech at the APEC Summit, the General Secretary emphasizes the importance of not forgetting the initial intentions and remembering the mission amid the turbulent and transformative global landscape. In translating this, the translator opted not to replicate the complexity of the classical Chinese style but chose a straightforward translation, rendering the essence of classical Chinese into English. This approach ensures that English-speaking readers can more directly and clearly understand the cultural connotations embedded in the written speech.

Example 4: “Deepen your engagement in China”.

Analysis: In the Chinese context, “深耕” is a traditional agricultural term referring to the fundamental practices of soil cultivation. Before activities like sowing seeds or transplanting seedlings, plowing the field, overturning deep soil layers, and covering with shallow soil are essential. This term has ancient expressions like “深耕浅种” and “深耕细作.” In contemporary usage, “深耕” has become increasingly prevalent, often associated with expressions in news discourse, such as “深耕国内市场” (deepening cultivation in the domestic market) and “深耕本土” (deepening cultivation in the local market). Based on metaphorical thinking, the term “深耕” in the context of external communication and the new era often conveys a more vivid and fitting description of the current societal background than words like “focus” or “emphasize” do. In the discussed written speech, the use of “深耕” aims to convey the speaker’s desire for international investors to continue focusing on China, deeply exploring the investment potential, and envisioning the vibrant investment prospects in China. In the English translation, the choice of “deepen your footprint” communicates the idea of making the engagement more profound and expansive, emphasizing both strengthening and continuing. This aids English-speaking readers in better understanding China’s openness to the APEC and the sincere welcome to investors from various countries.

Adaptive Transformation in the Communicative Dimension

Adaptive transformation in the communicative dimension involves the translator considering the adaptive selection and transformation of bilingual communicative intentions. Ensuring that the translated version aligns with the communicative intent of the source text is crucial for effective communication.

Example 5: “All of you should promote the innovative spirit of ‘Dare to be the first in the world’”.

Analysis: The phrase “敢为天下先” is derived from Chapter 67 of *Laozi*, where it states, “I have three treasures, guard and keep them: The first is deep love, The second is frugality, And the third is not to dare to be ahead of the world”. The meaning of “敢为天下先” implies the courage to be a pioneer, to open up new avenues, and to undertake endeavors that others have not. Translating “敢为天下先” as “make full use” fails to capture

the intended meaning of the speaker, which is about having the courage to be a trailblazer. This translation impedes effective communication by not allowing readers to deeply grasp the cultural connotations in the source language. A more suitable translation would be “Dare to be first in the world”, which better conveys the speaker’s emphasis on courageously leading the way and instilling confidence in the audience about China and the Asia-Pacific achieving prosperous development. This adjustment enhances the effectiveness of bilingual communication.

Example 6: “Encircling high walls around a small courtyard”.

Analysis: The reference to “小院高墙” originates from the *Book of Songs—Xiaoya—Felling Timber*¹. In ancient times, small courtyards were typically surrounded by high walls, protecting privacy and shielding individuals from external interference. In modern diplomatic contexts, this term is often used in China to describe a U.S.-styled policy of isolationism. Here, “小院” refers to specific technologies and research areas directly related to U.S. national security, while “高墙” represents the strategic boundaries delineated around these domains. For core technologies within this “courtyard”, the U.S. would implement more rigorous and forceful containment measures against China. However, in other high-tech fields beyond this “courtyard”, the U.S. may choose to reconsider opening up to China. The translator, in converting this expression, opts for a straightforward translation that conveys the meaning of the source language. This allows readers to easily comprehend the speaker’s intended message, promoting a thorough understanding of the Asia-Pacific region’s theme of open and inclusive cooperation and distinguishing it from the less friendly cooperative attitudes of some Western countries. This approach effectively achieves the communicative intent.

Conclusion

Viewing the English translation of China’s external propaganda texts from the perspective of ecological translation studies, translators must navigate the inherent characteristics of seriousness, accuracy, and flexibility. They need to organically integrate these diverse features, conducting a comprehensive analysis of linguistic, cultural, and communicative dimensions. Translators can make optimal choices by selecting various translation strategies and adapting to the ecological environment of external propaganda text. This approach aims to achieve effective communication on the international stage, fostering a positive dissemination effect that enhances global understanding of China and, in turn, promotes internationally friendly exchanges and cooperation.

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