

The Use of Strategies in Diplomatic Translation

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Abstract: With the continuous development of the world's political economy, global communication and dialogue in the post-pandemic era have returned to normal, and the demand for diplomatic translation has also increased. The dialectical unity of precision and ambiguity is a common linguistic feature of diplomatic language usage in various countries. As the important official access to cross-cultural communication, if some expressions in diplomatic translation cannot be properly handled, they may lead to serious diplomatic accidents. Restricted by the influence of national psychological traits, historical and cultural backgrounds, and values, there is a significant linguistic and cultural distance between Chinese and Western languages, causing the different translation methods adopted in translation. With specific language registers and translation strategies, countries have developed different diplomatic images and sought communication and cooperation. This article mainly compares the translation skills taken by China and the US in the diplomatic context and analyzes the underlying reasons, exploring the impact of political stances on diplomatic translation.

Keywords: Translation methods, political stand, diplomatic translation

1. Introduction

With the increasing development of the world's economy and the improvement of cultural soft power, cross-cultural communications based on foreign exchanges have been expanding. To faithfully translate the original text and script, various translation strategies are often adopted in the diplomatic translation. However, when Western media translate Chinese-related content, some of the content may differ from the Chinese version due to differences in ideology and political stance. [1]

The relationship between China and the US is critical to the whole world, as one is the biggest developing nation in the world, with a considerable labor resource and market, while the other is the most powerful developed nation. China has historically attached a high significance to this partnership since it directly influences its strategic security. [2] Therefore, to serve as a channel for interactions between the two countries, the diplomatic translation work must be precise; otherwise, it could have catastrophic consequences for both nations as well as the entire world.

In diplomatic texts that play a role in publicizing the country, from the author's perspective, the translation of words must adhere to the political stance, and the translation of diplomatic language has a high degree of political sensitivity and strong policy orientation. In the process of translating diplomatic texts, in addition to accurately and faithfully reflecting the original text and adopting an understandable target language (i.e. following the principles of fidelity, accuracy, and consistency in

diplomatic translation), it is also necessary to have a sense of subjectivity and stand firm in one's political position.

2. Analysis of Translation Strategies in China and the United States

In this part, the author selected several different lectures translated from the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the major press in the United States. These articles include both translated official versions released by the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the US Consulate in China as well as online news from the Global Times magazine website. The author reads through these articles one by one, identifying the regularity of the samples to see if the same or different translation methods are adopted in different versions of translation. Through sorting out all the texts in this study, the author found that there are several processing methods as follows.[3]

2.1. Amplification and Omission

Amplification and Omission are some of the most common strategies used in translation.

Amplification refers to introducing words that are not used in the original text but contain the actual content during translation based on the original meaning, logical relationship, syntactic characteristics, and expression habits of the target language. To prevent redundancy in the translation, omission is a translation strategy that corresponds to amplification. It involves deleting words that do not follow the logical conventions, linguistic conventions, and expressive styles of the target language. In English-to-Chinese translation, it is common to omit conjunctions, prepositions, verbs, and certain words. In the circumstance of diplomatic translation, to precisely translate the texts and produce cultural output, amplification, and omission are widely used.

Examples:

1. Source text: 二是要加强对话，妥善管控矛盾分歧。[4]

Translation: "Second, it is important to step up dialogue and properly manage the differences."

This sentence is collected in the speech in 2021, the time when the China-US relationship was at a low ebb. The future direction of the relationship between the two countries has a straightforward impact on the entire world pattern, so China's attitude was particularly noteworthy. In the text, instead of merely translating “矛盾分歧” into conflicts and differences, in the version from the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, conflicts and differences are summarized into “differences”, showing China's moderate attitude of seeking common ground while reserving differences.

2. Source text: 加紧构建以国内大循环为主体、国内国际双循环相互促进的新发展格局。

Translation: "At the moment, China is following the new development vision, fostering a new development paradigm featuring 'dual circulations', with domestic circulation as the mainstay and domestic and international circulations reinforcing each other."

For Westerners, it is hard for them to understand the actual meaning of dual circulations literally. Therefore, the translator puts forward the definition and explanation after introducing the concept of dual circulations, making it much clearer for the readers to understand.

3. Source text: China Central Television, a state outlet, provides free video footage and television scripts to 1,700 foreign news organizations and media groups. [5]

Translation: “中国中央电视台是一家国有媒体，免费向 1700 家外国新闻机构和媒体集团提供视频素材和电视脚本。”

By using appositives, the name of a company or institution has been translated with an explanation to give foreign readers clues to understand specific terms. The noun phrases used as appositives are mainly used to explain the business scope, attributes, history, and position in the industry of the company or institution. Some of these annotations appear to provide readers with a basic understanding of the background of the company or institution.

2.2. Literal translation and free translation

A literal translation is a type of translation or translated text that accurately captures the meaning and structure of the source text. Free translation, also known as free-form translation, is a kind of translation that keeps the original text's content instead of its form. In diplomatic translation, to most effectively output the information and make it clear to both sides, both of the strategies are used during translation.

Examples:

1. Source text:今天，中美关系要拨乱反正，重回正轨，首先需要打破由各种对华错误认知而人为砌起的高墙，真正客观准确地了解中国、认识中国、读懂中国。

Translation: “Today, to right the wrongs and bring the relationship back to the right track, the walls of misperceptions must be torn down first to clear the way for knowing, observing, and understanding China as it is.”

“Tear down the walls of misperceptions” is closely related to the original text, in which the metaphorical part of the original text is retained, and the ice-breaking of China-US relations is linked with the removal of the high wall, indicating that the premise of China-US relations is to promote exchanges and communications. Although some of the content has added the author's subjective emotion, the affinity and charisma contained in the source language can reach the audience's heart directly regardless of differences, and evoke emotional resonance between country and country.

2. Source text:两国交往的社会和民意基础遭到不应有的“毒化”。

Translation: “The social foundation of bilateral relations was "poisoned", which should not be allowed to happen in the first place.”

When the target language and the source language share the same conceptual metaphors and corresponding metaphorical expressions, the translator can transplant the source language's conceptual metaphors and their metaphorical expressions into the target language, so that the mapping relationships and images presented by the metaphors in the source language can be preserved. In this text, the word “poisoned” is a literal translation form that directly translates “毒化”. In this case, the translator used “poisoned” to express the speaker's concerns and criticisms about the impact of various factors on China-US relations.

3. Source text:双方共同努力，推动中美关系这艘巨轮尽快回归健康发展的航道，驶入海阔天空的美好明天！

Translation: “I hope that the two sides will work together to steer the giant ship of China-US relations back to the course of sound development toward a bright future with boundless prospects.”

The translated version retains the metaphorical usage in the original to make the deeper meaning of "Grasp the bright tomorrow of China-US relations" more vivid, which is in line with the speaker's logic and expectations for the continuous progress of China-US relations.

4. Source text: Navigating the contours of the relationship between the United States and China is no easy task.

Translation: “把握中美关系的复杂性绝非易事。” [6]

The original meaning of this sentence tends to illustrate the importance of understanding and tracing the right direction in the development direction between the two largest economies: the United States and China. In the translation, the translator used “复杂性” to conclude the process, which is more concise.

5. Source text:中国共产党不会躺在功劳簿上沾沾自喜。 [7]

Translation: “The CPC will not rest on its laurels.”

The original meaning of “rest on its laurels” refers to being content with the attained achievements and no longer thinking of progress. Using the expression “not rest on its laurels” is more intuitive to show CPC will never stop its pursuit of the future, instead of just lying down and doing nothing.

In diplomatic translation, apart from producing information precisely, it is also acceptable to grasp the readers' desire for novelty, as well as their expectations for unfamiliarity when facing an exotic culture. When translating specific vocabularies, we can appropriately retain the meaning in the original text, namely Chinese cultural information, and present the ideological, historical, and cultural connotations behind this information one by one through additional translation, interpretation, and other means.

6. Source text: 《决议》概括出十条经验，就是中国共产党的“成功学”。

Translation: “The 10 points of experience summed up in the Resolution are the recipe for the CPC’s success.”

The literal translation of “成功学” should refer to “the theory of success”, “the topic of success” etc. Apart from the common meaning “a set of instructions that tell you how to cook something and the ingredients you need for it”, “recipe” has the meaning “a method or an idea that seems likely to have a particular result”. The expression “recipe of the CPC’s success” is not only vivid but also balances the meaning of “the theory of success”.

2.3. Appropriate diplomatic words

In diplomatic situations, translators need to consider words that are more appropriate to the context and national policy to uphold the national position. In some cases, every word that is highly relevant to the deep interests of various countries bears a significant responsibility. In the translation of diplomatic texts, in order to avoid ambiguity during translation, accurate wording leads to clear concepts. In such a scenario, translators need to choose words more carefully to maintain national interests and feelings between countries while accurately transmitting information and being faithful to the original text.

Examples:

1. Source text: 我们积极参与斡旋热点问题。

Translation: “We actively participate in the good offices on hotspot issues.”

The English word hotspot usually means a place of political unrest and potential violence. In Chinese, “热点” also refers to the new and highly-attention issues. Using hotspot to translate 热点 divides China’s responsibility on global political issues, and addresses China’s attitude on not interfering in the internal affairs of any country but upholding the international orders.

2. Source text: 中国西藏被称为“世界屋脊”，山川壮美、人杰地灵。[8]

Translation: “China’s Xizang is known as the “Roof of the World”. It is a land of abundance with magnificent landscape and talented people.”

In the past, "Xizang" was translated into English as “Tibet” for a long time. However, in a large number of contexts the word “Tibet” is used overseas to represent not only “Xizang” but also Tibetan-related prefectures and counties in Qinghai, Sichuan, Gansu, and Yunnan provinces. This geographical range highly overlaps with the so-called “Great Tibetan Region” established by the 14th Dalai Lama Group for a long time, which has seriously misled the international community to understand the geographical scope of Xizang correctly. The change in the English translation of the word “Xizang” helps to reconstruct the image of Xizang's media and enhances China's international discourse power in Tibet, showing the political stand of China.

3. Reasons for different translation strategies

3.1. Social system

The ever-changing society can be one of the key factors that determines the translation strategy. Translation is a human communication activity that occurs in a specific social context and a social behavior with social translators as the subject; The dissemination and acceptance of translation are constrained by the cultural and social conditions of the target language; Translation strategies are constrained by specific social conditions and socialized discourse events;[9] It is also a social phenomenon that reflects resistance and integration in language communication, a system that exists in the social system and has a self-consistent logic.

In reverse, the development of a translation strategy can also lead to social movements. In the social value of translation, the promoting effect of translation on society lies first in its communicative nature, second in its influence on the national spirit and the thinking of the people, and third in its direct impact on crucial social-political movements and reform campaigns. Due to its unique context, diplomatic translation will directly lead to changes in the relationship between countries. Therefore, adopting these translation strategies is also a part of safeguarding national interests.

3.2. Ideology

It is generally believed in China that ideology is part of the superstructure, and the cultivation and requirements of ideology for a translator determine that the translator will adopt different strategies to adjust the wording and linguistic logic in translation, to achieve a high degree of unity with ideology. Regardless of the historical period, translation is an activity carried out in a certain political environment. It is inevitable for translators to determine the communicative purpose of the translation and take into account the political environment in which it is located. Political factors are also an important component of the concept of ideology, which is reflected in the mainstream social ideology and even national ideology at that time.[10] Therefore, the translator must consider whether the purpose of the translation is to maintain the mainstream ideology or to oppose, criticize, or even subvert the mainstream ideology at that time.

3.3. International status

With the continuous improvement of China's international status, strategies used in diplomatic translation are constantly changing, which corresponds to the tactics used in diplomatic occasions. The rise of international status means that effective words and speeches are needed to safeguard national interests and build a positive image of the country. In recent years, Western countries have strengthened their specialized translation capabilities and deepened the analysis and dissemination of information on politics, policies, ideology, and other aspects of countries mainly based on China. It can be foreseen that the global competition for translation supremacy and international discourse power will accompany the entire process of the country's rise.

4. Conclusions

By comparing the translation versions of diplomatic texts provided by the Chinese Foreign Ministry and the US Embassy, we can better understand the styles and priorities of diplomatic translation between the two countries. The version provided by the Chinese Foreign Ministry focuses more on the original text, while the translation provided by the US is more closely aligned with the language habits of native English speakers, providing a reference model for the sustainable development of diplomatic translation. In addition, considering the differences in cultural backgrounds, customs, and

other aspects between China and other countries in the world, great differences may lie in the understanding between Chinese and English diplomatic texts under the two language conditions. Therefore, precise methods and dictions in the translation of diplomatic texts are inevitable to avoid conflicts.[11]

To grasp this characteristic, translators engaged in diplomatic translation should also follow the following principles: fairness, impartiality, and representing the national interests. In diplomatic translation, a keen mind of reader awareness should be equipped to make reasonable use of various translation methods and improve the acceptability of the target text. [12] Translators need to use translation methods flexibly, play their role in diplomatic translation, and bring more benefits to their respective countries.

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