

Translation Strategy of External Publicity from the Perspective of Functional Equivalence Theory

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[Abstract] With the development of globalization, publicity-oriented translation from Chinese into English has played an increasingly important role in China's external exchanges, especially in the political field. When translating materials for the purpose of external publicity, translators often encounter discourses with Chinese characteristics that embody China's unique objects, phenomena, or policies. This paper tries to conduct research on external publicity via case studies of translating discourses with Chinese characteristics from the perspective of the functional equivalence theory proposed by Eugene Nida.

[Keywords] functional equivalence theory; external publicity; translation strategy; discourses with Chinese characteristics

Introduction

With the development of global integration, interactions between countries have become increasingly close. China has undergone tremendous changes with its increasingly important influence in the international arena. At the same time, China has been actively displaying its cultural heritage and advantages. External publicity is aimed at “objectively and truly reflecting the socialist New China’s external policy, economy, culture and construction achievements, to foreigners, overseas Chinese and compatriots from Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan, from the fundamental and long-term interests of China, with the aid of modern media or other means of promotion, so as to gain the understanding, trust, and support of the people of the world, change their mindset towards China, and establish a good international image of China” (Huang, Z. 2002).

China is at the favorable stage of rapidly rising. It is urgently necessary to strengthen its international right of discourse. At the National Conference on Publicity Work, General Secretary Xi Jinping delivered an important speech and said, “We must carefully prepare for the external publicity, using creative approaches, and strive to create new concepts, categories and expressions for the integration of Chinese and external cultures, deliver Chinese stories well, and spread China’s voices.” This requires that while telling the story of China, China must also use the way that overseas readers like and make it more lively and appealing.

Mr. Huang Youyi pointed out that “External publicity is a concrete embodiment of a country’s external exchange and the building of humanistic environment” (2005). As a media and bridge, the translation of publicity materials undertakes the important mission of introducing China to the world and letting China go to the world. The pros and cons of external publicity translation directly affect China's international image. Meanwhile, as an important step in the process of strengthening discourse right, external publicity translation has been given a new mission of the times. Therefore, the important role of external translation is self-evident. This paper tries to illustrate translation methods concerning publicity-oriented discourses with Chinese characteristics, from the perspective of the functional equivalence theory proposed by Eugene Nida.

Literature Review

In China, the main task of external publicity translation is to conduct language processing on external promotion materials and spread China's voices to the world. Mr. Huang Youyi has proposed “three close principles” of the external publicity translation, that is, the external publicity translation should be close to the reality of China's development, the needs of overseas readers who seek information about China, and the principles of thinking habits of overseas audience (2002). In view of the above-mentioned principles, the external publicity translation is not only required to be “faithful, expressive and elegant.” More importantly, it has to be well received by the overseas audience with their respective cultural backgrounds.

Function of the Equivalence Theory to Publicity-Oriented Translation

In the 1980s, Eugene Nida, a famous American translation theorist and linguist, put forward the theory of functional equivalence in *Translation Theory and Practice*, which has had a profound impact on the translation field at home and abroad. According to Nida, the key to functional equivalence is the equivalence of reactions rather than equivalence of form. Translation is not the equivalence of language, but the equivalence of language functions. It is the equivalence of readers' psychological reactions (Nida 2004). In other words, translation does not pursue a rigid correspondence to the surface of the text, but instead requires a functional equivalence between languages.

The theory of functional equivalence focuses on the effect of translation from readers' perspectives, rather than on the comparison of source and target texts, thus providing a new vision for translation studies. With regard to external publicity and its translation, the target group is overseas readers. In order to achieve the favorable goal of external publicity, it is necessary to break courageously the original language structure so that the original and translated texts achieve functional equivalence. Only in this way, can the target readers understand the essence of publicity materials. In other words, the purpose of external publicity can be achieved. In view of this, functional equivalence theory, as a pragmatic theory with universal explanatory power, has a guiding role in the translation of external publicity.

Translation Methods of Publicity-Oriented Discourses with Chinese Characteristics

When translating external publicity materials, translators often encounter vocabularies with Chinese characteristics. These words have distinct features, referring to cultural customs, traditions, lifestyles, history and political events of China or the Chinese nation. Involving all aspects of China's politics, economy, and daily life, discourses with Chinese characteristics fully reflect China's unique objects, phenomena or policies. Due to the cultural vacuum, most Chinese-specific vocabularies lack corresponding expressions in English. For example: “Eight Honors and Eight Disgraces,” “Jinggangshan Spirit,” “Silk Spirit,” and so on. This paper provides examples of translation and discusses strategies for translation of Chinese-specific vocabularies for the purpose of external promotion from the perspective of functional equivalence theory proposed by Eugene Nida.

Cultural Dissimilarities or Even Paradoxes: Conversion or Rejection of Original Cultural Expression

Chinese and English cultures have similarities, differences, and even opposites. These cultural vocabularies have brought certain obstacles to the translation of external publicity. Due to cultural differences, if the original cultural expression is not recognized and accepted by the target audience, the literal translation may cause misunderstanding. Therefore, the external publicity translation may have the phenomenon of “unreasonable transmission” and “being unresponsive.” Therefore, it should be taken into consideration whether or not the target language has equivalent cultural expression to ensure that the target audience obtains similar reading results. If there is no equivalent cultural expression, the cultural phenomenon in the source language expression can be abandoned, and the original text information can be correctly conveyed through the method of free translation.

Example 1: Put an end to the period of semi-colonial and semi-feudal fragmentation in old China and bring the nation together.

Analysis: In the original text, “a situation of scattered sand” refers to the dispersion of forces, such as the sand that is not glued together in the same plate. If translated in a literal sense, overseas readers cannot understand the meaning, and their understanding is focused on sand rather than scattering. Therefore, taking into account the cultural differences, the original culture expression is abandoned in translation. This is a strategy that has to be the last resort. However, the liberal translation of “bring the nation together” successfully conveys the original text information to the target readers and achieves the equivalence in meaning.

Semantic Implication in Chinese: Appropriate Transliteration or Subtraction

There are ontological differences between the Chinese and English languages. When translating publicity-oriented texts, the differences in language habits and expressions between the two languages should be considered, and certain words and sentences should be appropriately increased or decreased to reproduce the original text appropriately, in order to translate the text smoothly and in a lively manner, more in line with the target language habits.

Example 2: By implementing the Eight Rules of the Party Central Committee, the program targets such problems as going through the motions, excessive bureaucracy, pleasure-seeking, and over-indulgence. Party members are required to look into the mirror, straighten the clothes, examine themselves, and clean up their act. Only by so doing, can they proactively tackle pressing problems of public concern and improve their work in the interests of the people to keep the Party corruption-free and in tune with the times.

Analysis: In 2013, the Political Bureau of the Central Committee of the CPC held a meeting, requesting that the entire process of the Party’s mass line education and practice activities. “Look into the mirror, straighten the clothes, examine themselves and clean up their act” has become a hot word after the “Chinese Dream.” This implies profound meanings, which indicates that every

Party member cadre should look into himself, correct himself, clean himself, strengthen himself, and become a pragmatic and honest Party member, part of the cadre that serves the people. The translation of “look into the mirror, straighten the clothes, examine themselves and clean up their act” retains the original metaphorical information, increases the semantic meaning of the original text, and reduces redundant information. That is to say, the method of appropriate transliteration or subtraction helps the audience better understand the original meaning of the source text.

Passing Elements with Chinese Characteristics: Appropriate Explanations and Highlights

In the process of translation, depending on specific circumstances, translators may fill in the blanks by means of interpretation and annotation, adopt literal translation or transferred translation, in order to highlight key information and transmit information as accurately as possible.

Example 3: We will continue to carry out supply-side structural reform, resolve major problems in economic development, and improve the supply system through better allocation of factors of production and adjusting industrial structure. With these efforts, we can energize the market and achieve coordinated development.

Analysis: In 2015, General Secretary Xi Jinping pointed out at the Central Financial Leadership Group meeting: “As we expand our total demand, we will focus on strengthening supply-side structural reform and focus on improving the quality and efficiency of the supply system.” Since then, the supply-side structural reform has attracted wide attention and heated discussions among Chinese and external media, thus becoming a hot phrase in China's current policies. The so-called supply-side structural reform refers to the reform initiated by the supply side and structural issues. It is translated here as “supply-side structural reform” and strives to convey elements with Chinese characteristics on the basis of retaining the original expression so that the target readers can fully understand the meaning.

Repeated Phenomenon in Chinese: Reorganization of Sentences with Clear Hierarchy

Sentences in both Chinese and English are, in a strict sense, not equivalent linguistic units. Chinese tends to repeat the original word, aiming at emphasis. The Chinese language presents features of longer modifiers and more complex sentence structures. The English language tends to be concise and to the point.

The external publicity translation has the characteristics of salience, stimulation, and simplicity concerning information. Translators should prioritize the needs of target readers in the translation process, screen and reorganize the source language information, and highlight the simplicity and readability of the translation (Li, 2012). Taking into account the differences between Chinese and English languages, the strategy of segmentation is used generally in translation, and the structure of discourse is adjusted to be close to the thinking habits of overseas readers and better convey the original text information.

Example 4: Leading officials are not allowed to use their position or influence to favor their family or friends. The latter are forbidden to intervene in official duties, including personnel decisions.

Analysis: The translation of this paragraph does not pursue the rigid equivalence in form. However, it breaks the original long sentence into two separate sentences. Each sentence has a clear subject and predicate, with a complete structure and clear meaning. In the second sentence of the translation, “the later” refers to “their family or friends” in the first sentence, which reflects hierarchy in English and retains the intrinsic link between various components in the source sentence. After the sentence is broken, the hierarchy is clear, avoiding various potential problems, such as mixed sentences, unsmooth connection, unknown semantics, and so on.

Conclusion

The purpose of external publicity translation is to convey original text information and attract external audience. The functional equivalence theory emphasizes the acceptability of translation in the target language audience and provides theoretical guidance for the translation of external publicity across language and culture. The most important feature of the external publicity translation is that the pre-defined audience is not a native speaker.

External publicity translation is by no means nearly mechanical, simple technical work of “inter-lingual translation.” In order to become qualified translators in the field of external publicity, translators not only need profound knowledge and flexible translation skills, but also need to achieve comprehensive balance in terms of the purpose and function of the translation, the reproduction of original meaning, and the feelings of target readers.

Based on thorough knowledge of the original language, the translator should get rid of the shackles of the source language structure, focus on the target language audience, and pay attention to functional equivalence rather than formal equivalence. The translation should accurately convey the original text information to the target language audience and enable them to obtain the reading effect expected by the source language author. This is the key to the success of external publicity translation.

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