Research on the Translation Strategies of Political Terms from the Perspective of Political Equivalence

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ABSTRACT

Political terms are the political concepts with specific meanings formed by parties and governments in their political activities in dealing with the country's internal and external affairs. Chinese scholar Yang Mingxing proposes the theory of "Political Equivalence" on the basis of Eugene Nida's theory of "Functional Equivalence". According to the theory of "Political Equivalence", the translation of political terms should take into account the principles of Political Orientation, Equilibrium and Dynamics. Taking *Report on the Work of the Government 2022* as a case, this paper explores the translation strategies of political terms from the perspective of Political Equivalence.

Keywords: Political Equivalence, Political term translation, Report on the Work of the Government 2022.

1. INTRODUCTION

Political terms refer to professional words with specific meanings and forms formed by the political parties and the government in a series of activities in handling domestic and foreign affairs. It includes not only political content, but also national affairs such as national defence, science and technology, education, and people's livelihood. Political terms are widely found in political literature and leaders' speeches and selections, which spread the mainstream ideology of the country, declare the international image and political stance to the outside world.

According to Xu and Deng (2023:20), a political term is an authoritative, formal and concise term used by the national government when people interpreting major policy policies, and directly represents the national position in the international public opinion circle. The international dissemination of important national political terms can directly have an impact on the construction of a country's political discourse system and the amount of international discourse power through media interaction, and then affect the image of political parties, governments and even national images. Political texts are written by participants in political activities in order to achieve

specific purposes, such as releasing intelligence, stating positions, exerting influence, and regulating public opinion, including government work reports, press conferences, white papers, etc., which belong to information texts, and the most important function is to transmit information and knowledge.

Report on the Work of Government is an official document report of the Chinese Government's work review within one year and the work task plan for the year, which can show and publicize China's ideology and basic policies in politics, economy and culture. Chinese political terms cover Chinese political thought, including colloquialisms, idioms, proverbs and even poems, all of which contain unique and profound traditional Chinese cultural heritage. Translation is particularly vital in order to achieve the same political connotation as the source texts.

This thesis explores the translation of Chinese political terms from the perspective of Political Equivalence, and explores how the translators achieve Political Equivalence, in order to provide ideas for the translation research of government documents and better achieve the effect of political international communication.

As a crucial part of discourse and narrative system, translation of political terms is a window to

display a country's overall and comprehensive national strength. As translators deepen the translation of political terms, they can insist on their cultural stance, refine and display the spiritual symbols and cultural essence of civilization, accelerate the construction of discourse and narrative system, strengthen international communication capacity building, comprehensively improve international communication efficiency, form an international discourse power that matches its comprehensive national strength and international status, deepen exchanges and mutual learning among civilizations, and promote its culture spreading.

At the present stage, China's political terms translation work is based on the Party and the people, and is committed to publicizing the major principles, policies and strategic ideas put forward by the Communist Party of China to all countries in the world, publicizing China's political, economic, cultural and social achievements, publicizing the spiritual outlook of the Chinese people in unity and forging ahead, shaping China's good image, and enhancing China's right to speak on the international stage. Political terms have played a pivotal role in disseminating traditional Chinese culture and diplomatic concepts, implementing national foreign policy, and enhancing foreign image and international discourse. (Yang, 2014:103)

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Introduction to Political Equivalence Translation Theory

Since 2008, Yang Mingxing has proposed the Political Equivalence standard of diplomatic translation for the first time on the basis of evaluating the Equivalence translation theory and the particularity of diplomatic language of American translation theorist Nida and using the analytical perspective of diplomacy and international relations.

As the major theoretical foundation and framework of this thesis, Political Equivalence guides translation strategies of political terms with Chinese characteristics in *Report on the Work of Government*.

2.1.1 The Background/Foundation of Political Equivalence

Eugene Nida, an American linguist who developed the Dynamic-Equivalence translation

theory and one of the founders of the modern discipline of translation studies. His most notable contribution to translation theory is Dynamic Equivalence, also known as Functional Equivalence, which is often held in opposition to the views of philologists who maintain that an understanding of the source text (ST) can be achieved by assessing the inter- animation of words on the page and that meaning is self-contained within the text.

In later years, Nida distanced himself from the term Dynamic Equivalence and preferred the term "Functional Equivalence". What the term "Functional Equivalence" suggests is not just that the equivalence is between the function of the source texts in the source culture and the function of the target text (TT) in the target culture, but that "function" can be thought of as a property of the texts. It is possible to associate Functional Equivalence with how people interact in cultures.

Functional Equivalence is the foundation of Political Equivalence, however, those two theories possess a number of differences. Political Equivalence carry forward and developed Functional Equivalence, they share a common origin and interconnected. Functional Equivalence has a general significance, mainly suitable for translation practice in general field focusing on meaning and stylistic equivalence. For the translation of diplomatic language, to achieve the ideal equivalence in politics is relatively difficult under the general criterion of Functional Equivalence. Political Equivalence, on the other hand, is a specific standard applicable to the special field of diplomatic language translation, with greater emphasis on equivalence in political connotations.

2.1.2 The Development of Political Equivalence

In 2008, Yang Mingxing proposed Political Equivalence in his paper *On Political Equivalence in Translating Diplomatic Terms: Tao Guang Yang Hui as Example* for the first time. In the paper, the author analysed the translation of Tao Guang Yang Hui, literally "Maintaining a Low Profile", a well-known dictum made by Deng Xiaoping. Yang exemplified the differences and connections between Functional Equivalence and Political Equivalence, as well as pointed out that Functional Equivalence is inadequate under a specific diplomatic language translation circumstance. In such a condition, the author introduced the

translation principles and method of Political Equivalence.

He rolls out two major principles to achieve "political equivalence" of the diplomatic translation, one is, thoroughly understand the political context of the speaker and accurately convey the contemporary connotations of diplomatic language, the another is, convey the speaker's political position in a language that is pleasing to the receiver and the translated text conveys the same information effect as the original.

Yang Mingxing has also summed up six methods and techniques to achieve Political Equivalence in the paper, that is, translators should be committed to both the source and target language, grasp the relationship between the speaker and audience; Political Equivalence must be dynamic; Translation methods should be flexible and diverse, and the language form should be constantly adjusted; Translators should be familiar with the differences in English and Chinese customs and culture, national emotions and ideologies; Acquire background knowledge of China's foreign policy and international relations to ensure political correctness in diplomatic translation; As well as cannot ignore grammatical phenomena and rules unique to English.

After four years, Yang published his second paper about Political Equivalence named Translation Strategies for Diplomatic Language in the Framework of Political Equivalence—A Case Study of the Translation of "No Z-turn" in 2012. In that paper, the author summarized the principles and methods in his previous work as three characteristics, which is, Political Orientation, Dynamics and Equilibrium.

Actually, Political Orientation is a characteristic which integrated the two prominent principles mentioned in previous paper, to accurately convey speakers' political position and connotation, the cultural and ideology differences between source language and target language, as well as the speakers and audiences must take into consideration. Both Dynamics and Equilibrium is summed from the translation method in Yang's last paper. Dynamics holds that translators should be up to date, pay attention to the latest development and new contents of target language, as well as follow the corresponding political context of source language and target language. Characteristic of Equilibrium emphasis equilibrium between source language, target language, source language author and target language reader/audience should be

maintained, translators should commit to acquire the same or similar effect in political tendency and emotional significance during the translation.

In 2014, Yang published his *Principles and Strategies of the Translation of Chinese Diplomatic Neologisms*. Diplomatic neologism includes brand new terms, old terms containing new meaning and loan word, he refers diplomatic neologism as a high culture-load language. The author also proposed four new principles to translate the diplomatic neologism, that is, political equivalence, uniformity in translation, professional expression and customary convention. The principles provided a new perspective for the translation of diplomatic neologism and also standardized the translation of political terms. Yang released *Exploring the Translation of "Tout visit" from the Perspective of Political Equivalence* in 2015, the passage takes "tout visit" as a case study, specifically explores the translation strategies of diplomatic neologism.

2.1.3 The Principles of Political Equivalence

Political Equivalence holds that the connotation is that on the one hand, diplomatic translation must accurately and faithfully reflect the source language and the speaker's political thought and political context, and on the other hand, diplomatic translation must be expressed in the translated language that the recipient can understand so that the political meaning information obtained by both parties is equivalent to the value and the translation can play the same or similar communication role as the source texts. Only a translation into a diplomatic language that satisfies the above two requirements can be considered an ideal translation.

The Political Equivalence translation concept emphasizes that the translation of political discourse should be based on the first principle of accurately conveying the political meaning of the source discourse. Since the understanding of political discourse is deeply affected by contextual factors such as the context of its time, the translation of political discourse necessarily needs accurately understanding the dynamic meaning of the source discourse and accurately convey the source discourse. Different countries have their own ideologies and political systems; Therefore, the corresponding political discourse will naturally bring strong national cultural characteristics, which is reflected in the translation of political discourse, and the translator needs to remain neutral in the two cultures, and cannot praise one over the other. In

this way, a balance can be truly maintained between the acceptance of the target language and the accurate understanding of the source utterance. Yang Xingxing's concept of Political Equivalence is based on the analysis of the English translation controversy of various typical contemporary political terms, hence, it has strong explanatory power for the translation of political discourse, including diplomatic discourse, official white papers, and summit forum interpretation.

2.1.4 The Application of Political Equivalence

In contemporary China, political discourse is mainly embodied in the process of description and administrative communication of the social governance behaviour of party organizations and people's governments at all levels. With the Communist Party of China (CPC) as the mainstay, the ruling model is deeply rooted in Chinese culture and has its own characteristics, hence, Chinese political discourse is similar to other countries' political discourse in terms of language characteristics, and also presents distinctive Chinese cultural characteristics. Taking the emerging political term, a human community with a shared future as an example, it reflects not only the modern Chinese people's vision of the relationship between countries in the present and future society, but also the CPC's sketching of a certain dimension of the global future development blueprint. It is fundamentally different from the traditional political concepts such as universal values and natural rights put forward by Western society. Therefore, political discourses such as a human community with a shared future should be carefully handled in order to better convey China's political ideas.

As a translation standard based on the foreign translation of various political discourses with Chinese characteristics, the Political Equivalence translation principle proposed by Yang Mingxing has been widely recognized by relevant scholars. The view of Political Equivalence provides an analytical framework for the English translation of political discourse. Translators can make a comprehensive evaluation of relevant translation processing based on the analysis of the linguistic expression characteristics and various contextual characteristics of relevant political discourse and the application of this translation principle as a guide.

2.2 Three Characteristics of Political Equivalence Translation Theory

Political Equivalence Translation Theory has three characteristics, which are Political Orientation, Equilibrium and Dynamics. Translators should correctly understand and convey the political implication of the source texts under the guidance of the above three characteristics to achieve the same or similar effect with the source texts.

2.2.1 Political Orientation

Politics Orientation is the most prominent characteristics of Political Equivalence, which is the fundamental of political text translation. Political discourses often involve the ideological line of a country's government, the major policies implemented at home, the diplomatic strategies implemented abroad, government positions and foreign relations, thus possessing a high degree of political sensitivity. Therefore, the cultural and ideological differences between the source language and the target language should be taken into consideration in the translation of political text so as to accurately convey the speaker's political stance and political connotation. Considering particularity of political text, the translation of political text needs to be more rigorous and faithful.

2.2.2 Equilibrium

Equilibrium means the fine balance a translator should maintain between source language and target language and between the author/speaker and the audience (Yang, 2008). After all, translation is a cross-cultural communication behaviour. The primary target of translation is to send the right message in a manner acceptable to author/speaker and the audience. The importance which is attached to Equilibrium reveals the important role of harmony and balance two essential elements embodied in traditional Chinese culture and values. Although translators in the diplomatic context typically serve as the agent of one party and act on behalf of the party's interests, they can maintain relative harmony and show equal respect to both sides. The translator's mission is to work as a bridge and booster in mutual communication and contribute to satisfying results.

2.2.3 Dynamics

Dynamics indicates that translators must follow the times in the process of translation, familiarize

with the discourse background and social background of the source language, and grasp the latest development of the relationship between the target language and the source language. Language is constantly evolving and the exact meaning of the same expression may change with time and context. In the process of translating political text, translators must pay close attention to the dynamic development and change of the content of the source language and examine the corresponding political context of the source language and the target language. It is necessary to accurately grasp the extended meaning of the source texts and fully consider the contextual meaning of the target texts so as to make the target language closer to the discourse connotation of the source language.

3. THE CASE STUDY OF *REPORT ON THE WORK OF THE GOVERNMENT*

The annual *Report on the Work of the Government* is a summary of the work and work arrangements made by the Chinese Government to its people's deputies. The summary is the new achievements in the cause of building socialism with Chinese characteristics, and the deployment of major policies and basic national policies aimed at China's national conditions, and many new words, phrases, and new formulations are unique to China, and it is difficult to find ready-made corresponding words from English dictionaries. All the source texts in this study are from the official English version of *Report on the Work of the Government 2022*, translated by expert translators and editors with profound knowledge of political science. In this chapter, the examples selected from whole sentence containing targeted political terms are illustrated, along with the analysis of the political context and background.

3.1 Application of Political Orientation

Example 1

ST: 改革开放不断深化。在重要领域和关键环节推出一批重大改革举措，供给侧结构性改革深入推进。**"放管服"改革**取得新进展。

TT: Reform and opening up were deepened. In key fields and sectors, a full range of major reforms were rolled out, and supply-side structural reform was deepened. New gains were made in **the reform to streamline administration and delegate power, improve regulation, and upgrade services**.

Since the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, the reform of "streamline administration and delegate power, improve regulation, and upgrade services" has taken a three-pronged approach to loosen the constraints and reduce the burden on market entities, optimize and innovate the administrative supervision mechanism, base itself on the administrative essence of governance for the people, accelerate the transformation of the role of a service-oriented government, and achieve remarkable results.

The Chinese character "放" is "简政放权", which means "central government decentralizes administrative power and reduces administrative power without legal basis and legal authorization, and rationalizes administrative power that is managed repeatedly by multiple departments"; in the official translation, the free translation strategy is adopted, therefore, in the report, the character "简" is translated as "streamline", which means making a system, an organization, etc. work better. On the other hand, the principle of Political Orientation in the version of literal translation "simplify" is neglected, which cannot faithfully convey the connotation of ST.

The Chinese character "管" is "放管结合", which means "government departments should innovate and strengthen regulatory functions, and use new technologies and systems to strengthen innovation in regulatory systems"; "放" is translated as "delegate" to give part of your work, power or authority to somebody in a lower position than you, convey the meaning of reorient the position of government and redefine government, markets, social boundaries and their interrelationships.

The Chinese character "服" is "优化服务", which means "the government should transform its functions, reduce intervention in the market, the excessive administrative approval of market players and other acts, and the administrative costs of market operation of market players, and promote the vitality and innovative capacity of market players".

Many political terms with Chinese characteristics in Chinese are concise, condensed and generalized, therefore, in translating these political terms, based on Political Orientation principle, the free translation strategy is adopted to convey the connotation and intended meaning of the source texts.

Example 2

ST: 严格落实中央八项规定精神，持之以恒纠治"四风"，进一步为基层减负。

TT: We strictly complied with the central Party leadership's eight-point decision on improving work conduct, kept up our efforts to tackle **pointless formalities, bureaucratism, hedonism and extravagance**, and took further steps to ease the burdens of those working on the ground.

The Report of the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China pointed out that it is necessary to persevere in implementing the spirit of the eight central regulations, continue to deepen the rectification of the "pointless formalities(形式主义), bureaucratism(官僚主义), hedonism(享乐主义) and extravagance(奢靡主义)", focus on correcting formalism and bureaucratism, and resolutely eliminate privileged thinking and privileged behavior.

The most prevalent strategy for translating political terms with Chinses characteristics, such as numerical terms, is the literal translation plus free translation. This strategy could ensure the translation's alignment with Political Orientation (faithfulness to the source texts) and Equilibrium (offering detailed information of the terms).

"形式主义" refers to a method of thinking and work style that only takes the appearance of things into consideration without analysing their essence, which is "formalism". However, in the official translation version, translators use the adjective "pointless" to modify "formalism", functioning as the attribute. Formalism is a neutral word in English, which means a style that pays more attention to the rules and the correct arrangement and appearance of things than to the inner meaning and feelings, while "形式主义" in the Chinese language is a derogatory term.

In the official translation version, "官僚主义" and "享乐主义" is literally translated as "bureaucratism" and "hedonism".

"奢靡" refers to "someone's life is extravagant and profligate", therefore, "奢靡主义" is translated as "extravagance", which means "the act or habit of spending more money than you can afford or than is necessary".

In the process of translating political texts, translators should not only analyse the source texts accurately, but also choose words that fit the source texts more closely, while adopting various translation strategies such as literally translation plus free translation to make target texts clear and easy to understand.

3.2 Application of Equilibrium

Example 3

ST: 坚决反对敷衍应付、推诿扯皮，坚决纠治任性用权、工作方法简单粗暴。

TT: We will firmly oppose **perfunctory attitudes and buck passing in government**, and take strong steps to correct any abuse of power and any simplistic or unmannerly way of conducting work.

Through organizing "looking back", CPC requires the officials from all tiers to take on their duties and responsibilities, rectifying the problems of inaction and lack of responsibility such as empty statements, perfunctory attitudes and buck passing, and seeking stability without thinking about progress.

In Chinese political texts, it is commonplace for double two-character synonyms to constitute a four-Chinese-character phrase or idiom, such as "互帮互助", "懒政怠政", "真知灼见", ""高瞻远瞩" etc. When translating such terms, translators need to highly condense the meaning of the two synonyms, appropriately adopt omission translation strategy, and take the principle of Equilibrium into account to accurately convey the deep connotation of these political terms.

In this example, "敷衍" means "to do something perfunctorily, perform one's duty negligently, or be half-hearted about", and "应付" means "to do something perfunctorily, do something after a fashion". Both "敷衍" and "应付" reflect an attitude not to do the practical things. Therefore, "perfunctory" is an appropriate word in line with this kind of attitude.

"扯皮" has two meanings, which means "unprincipled quarrels" or "shirking responsibility". "推诿" also has the meaning of "shirking responsibility", in addition, "推诿" implies "to shift the blame onto others". According to *A Concise Oxford Dictionary of Politics and International Relations*, "buck-passing" is an English political slang, which means "the unwillingness or failure to accept responsibility for the consequences of a policy decision and blame another person or institution instead", according with some CPC officials' failing to carry out Party Central Committee's politics and requirements.

Example 4

ST: 我们要更加紧密地团结在以习近平同志为核心的党中央周围，高举中国特色社会主义伟大旗帜……

TT: We must rally more closely around the CPC Central Committee with Comrade Xi Jinping at its core, hold high **the banner of socialism with Chinese characteristics**……

The flag determines the direction, the road determines the destiny. The title of *the Report of the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China* solemnly declares "Hold high the banner of socialism with Chinese characteristics and unite and struggle for the comprehensive construction of a modern socialist country".

The English equivalent of "旗帜" is a flag, which denotes a symbol or mark. While its verb form refers to "to become tired, weaker or less enthusiastic", which is contradictory to the enlightening and inspiring connotation of China's socialism. In addition, "keep the flag flying" means "to represent your country or organization" or "to show your support for your country, an organization or an idea to encourage or persuade others to do the same". According to *Oxford Advanced Learner's English-Chinese Dictionary*, "banner" means "claiming to support a particular set of ideas", which is in line with the connotation of the Chinese word "旗帜". To sum up, "flag" is improper to be used in this translation. Hence, the translation of "旗帜" should be translated as "banner" instead of "flag".

Conversion of an image is typically applicable in translating contradicting and alien metaphors and can be used in the following scenarios. For one thing, the image in source texts is inappropriate to be directly translated into target texts due to several factors such as consideration of political or religious issues. For another thing, the image in source texts is unfamiliar to target texts audience and has no equivalent in target language. If the image of the source texts is not properly conveyed, it will lead to confusion or misunderstanding.

3.3 Application of Dynamics

Example 5

ST: 高质量共建"一带一路"稳步推进。

TT: **The Belt and Road Initiative** saw steady high-quality development.

In September and October 2013, Chinese President Xi Jinping put forward major initiatives to jointly build the Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road during his visits to Kazakhstan and Indonesia. Over the past 10 years, the Belt and Road Initiative has received positive responses from more and more countries and international organizations, received extensive attention from the international community, and expanded its influence.

When the Belt and Road Initiative was first proposed, there were many translated versions at home and abroad. For example, China Daily and BBC used the translation "One Belt, One Road"; In 2015, BBC quoted the "Belt and Road Strategy". In 2016, the normative term for the "Belt and Road" in China was also changed to the "Belt and Road" initiative, and the current normative translation is "Belt and Road Initiative".

From the perspective of dynamics, due to the significance of the "Belt and Road" initiative, at the beginning of its proposal, the initiative was relatively unfamiliar to the Western world. In order to strengthen the external publicity of Belt and Road Initiative and promote the Western society's understanding of Belt and Road Initiative, the original translation model of the country's international communication adopted the strategy of literal translation, which is translated as "One Belt, One Road". Such a translation is neat and catchy to read in line with the background of the times when China intended to vigorously publicize and promote itself to the world.

With the gradual advancement of Belt and Road Initiative an increasing number of countries and international organizations gradually get to understand, support and eagerly join Belt and Road Initiative. In the meantime, the purpose of external publicity is not only limited to introducing China to all countries in the world, but also committed to proving to the world that as the largest developing country, China means to follow the trend of the developing world, actively assume responsibilities and obligations, and achieve shared growth through consultation and collaboration with other countries to build a human community with a shared future. Therefore, the translation of "One Belt, One Road" no longer fits the current international context and domestic policy trends, hence, it has been substituted with "Belt and Road Initiative".

4. CONCLUSION

Translators can learn from the analysis of the above examples that when they translate political

terms with Chinese characteristics. Translators need to specifically analyse the political context of the political terms and adopt the most appropriate translation strategies. When analysing political terms, translators need to follow these three procedures. To begin with, translators need to consult official information sources and familiarize with the context and background of the political terms. Furthermore, translators should clarify the literal meaning and the deep connotation of the political terms. Moreover, based on the analysis results of the first two procedures, translators should select an appropriate translation strategy and check whether the translation strategy adopted follows the principles of Political Equivalence translation theory.

Featuring conciseness and generalization, political terms with Chinese characteristics cannot be made clear by using literal translation alone. To achieve ideal communicative effect, only when translators adopt various proper translation strategies, can translators convey the deeper connotation and concept of political terms to the target audience. For instance, translators can make use of literal translation plus free translation strategies to realize optimal effect in expressing the deep connotation of the source texts. In addition, translators have to use other translation strategies like addition and omission when necessary.

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