

On C-E Translation of the Terms with Chinese Characteristics in Report on the Work of the Government in 2023 Based on Functional Equivalence Theory

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Abstract:

As China's comprehensive national power and international status gain momentum, the research on the Report on the Work of the Government has played an ever-important role in telling China's stories well. This study is conducted to evaluate the C-E translation of the terms with Chinese Characteristics in Report on the Work of the Government in 2023 based on the functional equivalence theory, thoroughly analyse the translation methods and techniques of the terms with Chinese characteristics in Report on the Work of the Government in 2023 by means of classification and illustration and finally summarize the main findings and limitations of this study, which does a good job in facilitating China's external propaganda and cross-cultural communication.

Keywords:

The Terms with Chinese Characteristics, Functional Equivalence, Report on the Work of the Government in 2023

1. Introduction

This paper is designed to analyse C-E translation of the terms with Chinese characteristics in Government Work Report (GWR) in 2023 based on Functional equivalence theory. With the deepening of reform and opening up, China's international status and influence have been increasing, and GWR has become an window on China. GWR is an authoritative official document, covering information in various fields of China's politics, economy and culture, and reflecting the latest developments of China's social development. The functional equivalence theory integrates literal translation and free translation, opens up a new way of thinking about translation principles, incorporates the principle of reader response into the translation standard, and focuses on the reading effect and response of readers. It is therefore reasonable to think that applying the theory of functional equivalence to GWR is conducive to the readers' acceptance of the information.

It has to be admitted that research efforts have been devoted to the application of the functional equivalence theory to GWR, which argued for the practical value of Nida's functional equivalence theory in China, thus giving a huge boost to the domestic translation circles. Although considerable progress has been made, this has been accompanied by much debate. For one thing, the research data on GWR under the perspective of functional equivalence theory in recent years lacks due attention and is insufficient, failing to meet the present needs to some extent. For another, those researchers tend to classify translated GWR on the basis of translation techniques. There is thereby an urgent need but it is still a significant challenge to adopt a dissimilar classification standard of topic to dissect the terms with Chinese characteristics in *The GWR* (2023) based on functional equivalence theory.

In light of previous studies, this paper further explores and analyses the translation version of terms with Chinese characteristics in *The GWR* (2023) under the perspective of the functional equivalence theory by dividing them into different topics such as politics, economy, people's wellbeing and culture in order to verify the effectiveness and necessity of the application of the functional equivalence theory to vocabulary with Chinese characteristics in GWR, with the aim of promoting the development of government's foreign propaganda work and spreading the Chinese culture to the world.

2. Literature Review

2.1. *The Previous Studies on the Terms with Chinese Characteristics*

The studies of the terms with Chinese characteristics help push forward the spread of Chinese culture worldwide. As a unparalleled form of language expression of China, vocabulary with Chinese characteristics is unique, extensive and profound such as political terms, political concepts and words with national cultural traits. Vocabulary with Chinese characteristics in the broad sense refers to the vocabulary rooted in Chinese nationalities, while it, in the narrow sense, refers to Chinese words reflecting Chinese characteristics, national conditions, culture and thinking [1]. This viewpoint provides a new perspective for further understanding Chinese characteristic vocabulary. In addition, words with Chinese characteristic are lively, concise and rich in connotations, showing the social and cultural phenomena of Chinese society in various periods, including politics, economy, culture, daily life, etc. [2]. This view clarifies the linguistic features and wide coverage of the vocabulary with Chinese characteristics. From the perspective of comparing Chinese and foreign journals, Chen pointed out that *China Daily* adopts the translation strategy of domestication and the translation method of free translation, while learning the translation strategy of foreignization and the translation method of transliteration and imitation from British and American journals is fertile ground for the promotion of Chinese culture to the world, and to the promotion of linguistic exchange and cultural understanding [3]. In addition, based on an empirical study of *China Daily* and *The New York Times* in 2016, another scholar also pointed out that the increasing trend of Chinese media's "foreignization" strategy is conducive to the preservation of Chinese cultural characteristics in foreign propaganda translation, and revealed the reasons behind, including the change of people's conception of the understanding of the news genre and the strategy of "going global" of China in recent years [4]. Their research results help spread the Chinese culture by providing valuable experience and inspiration for translating words with Chinese characteristics.

However, the studies of the terms with Chinese characteristics in GWR may be inapplicable in some cases of practical translation measured by the classification standard of translation techniques without paying due attention to the topics of texts. For instance, a lexical study of GWR is based on the classification of omission, addition and so on under the perspective of the functional equivalence theory [5]. A drawback is that this method places much less emphasis on the diversity of parts in political texts, which may trigger overgeneralization. Under this circumstance, it is crucial to classify Chinese characteristic terms, which is conducive to adopting different translation methods and techniques for different types of terms, and concentrating on the main points. So it is desirable to adopt a different classification standard, dividing the Chinese characteristic vocabulary of The GWR(2023) into political vocabulary, economic vocabulary, people's wellbeing vocabulary and cultural vocabulary in a comprehensive and concise manner to meet the requirements of the current affairs and society.

2.2. The Previous Studies on Functional Equivalence Theory

The functional equivalence theory gives wings to idiomatic and precise translation by taking reader's psychological response into consideration. In the western world, the idea of "equivalence" in translation first originated in the Soviet Union and then spread to Europe and the United States, dating back to the middle of the 18th century and evolving over time. Tytler proposed the idea of equivalent translation in 1790, which emphasised the establishment of the same psychological feeling between the readers of the source text and the readers of the target text [6]. Jacobson holds a similar view, and further analyses the causal mechanism of this difference, which mainly includes the differences in language structure and language habits. Jacobson's idea of "equivalence of differences" is a milestone in the development of "equivalence" [7]. Based on the previous research, "dynamic equivalence" emerged and Eugene Nida's translation aimed to realize the effect that readers of the translated text and readers of the original text have basically the same response. In order to reduce misunderstanding and express more accurately, he replaced "dynamic equivalence" with "functional equivalence". After several years, in his book, *Language and Culture: Context in Translation*, Nida divided "functional equivalence" into "minimum equivalence" and "maximum equivalence", which promoted the further refinement and maturity of the theory of functional equivalence [8]. In China from 1980 to 1990s, Nida's functional equivalence theory was favoured and accepted by scholars. A famous scholar in 1981 introduced Nida's basic translation theory, including his view of translation, translation steps, semantic analysis method and interdisciplinary connection [9]. In 1982, Tan systematically introduced the theoretical principles of Nida's theory of functional equivalence, the communicative function of translation, the application of the component analysis method, and the conversion-generative translation method [10]. These articles outlined the general outline of the functional equivalence theory and created an opportunity for the introduction of the functional equivalence theory. During this period, many scholars and translators gave high evaluation to the functional equivalence theory. Some found it was a viable way to apply Nida's functional equivalence theory in GWR. By using the corpus research method, the functional equivalence of different lexical levels in GWR was studied so as to verify the feasibility and revelation of Nida's functional equivalence theory [11].

Nevertheless, the functional equivalence may be questionable and lacks credibility to some extent while tipping the balance in favour of readers without proper attention on texts. Newmark proposed communicative translation based on linguistics, emphasising the communicative function of translation [12]. And he enhance the rationality of translation with a focus on the translator's classification of texts into different genres according to linguistic functions, and translating for specific genres. Domestic scholars began to recognise the inadequacy of the functional equivalence theory and began question it from the late 1980s to the mid-1990s. For example, Guo distinguishes the concept of "equivalence" and argues "equivalence relationship" is relative rather than absolute [13]. During this period, domestic scholars thought critically about Nida's theory of translation, no longer blindly admiring it, but beginning to combine and apply it to the actual situation in China. From the mid-1990s to the present. Liu criticised Nida's underestimation of readers' cognitive ability, truth-seeking psychology, novelty-seeking psychology, and aesthetic pursuit. These scholars exposed the limitations of Nida's theory [14]. It can be seen that Chinese translators and scholars have revealed the shortcomings of Nida's theory of functional equivalence, negated and finally critically developed it. This has promoted the development of various disciplines and the progress of translation studies.

In conclusion, we should take dialectical view of studies of the vocabulary with Chinese characteristics and Nida's theory of functional equivalence through research, which is of high guiding significance and reference value, providing principles and suggestions for foreign propaganda translation. To be specific, it is evident that the classification of vocabulary with Chinese characteristics may lead to the situation that translation methods and translation techniques in one case may not be applicable to another when facing different topics of vocabulary with Chinese characteristics. Therefore, based on previous research, this paper tries to select and classify Chinese characteristic words on the basis of topics, analyse and appreciate translation methods and techniques for different types of words with Chinese characteristics.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Translated Items of Politics

Example 1: 承包地确权登记颁证

Translation: to determine, register, and certify contracted rural land rights

Analysis: To translate this word accurately, the translator should understand China's national conditions and political system. The rural land contract administrative department records the information of the plots, areas, spatial locations and changes of the contracted land of family farmers in the register. This definition has two conditions. First, the subject of rights is family farmers who contract land, and urban residents cannot contract rural land through family contract in principle. Second, the right is applied to land owned collectively by farmers and land owned by the state that is legally used collectively by farmers, including arable land, forest land, grassland, and other land legally used for agriculture. These lands are contracted by household contracting within rural collective economic organizations. Therefore, the translator should have a certain background knowledge when translating this expression, and understand the specific meaning of this expression in the context of Chinese society. From this example, it is clear that the translators adopt literal

translation to make sense precisely and concise and clear means of expression to convey information directly and effectively.

Example 2: 中国式现代化

Translation: Chinese modernization

Analysis: Functional equivalence theory emphasizes being faithful to the source text and the closest to the original. In this part, the translators should explore the meaning of the original text, but also accurately understand the political meaning of the original text. Chinese modernization is the socialist modernization under the leadership of the Communist Party of China. It has the common features of modernization of all countries, and more importantly, it has Chinese characteristics based on its own national conditions. In translating this word, the translators adopt literal translation strategy and word-for-word equivalence to ensure the accuracy which is easy to understand and enables the receptors of the message in the receptor language to respond to it in substantially the same manner as the receptors in the source language.

Example 3: 爱国者治港，爱国者治澳

Translation: Hong Kong and Macao are administered by patriots

Analysis: In other words, those who hold the power to govern the SAR must be patriots. Patriots elected by the people of Hong Kong and Macao govern Hong Kong and Macao. The patriots here adhere to the “One China” principle and oppose national division. Administer puts increased emphasis on the management and organization of the affairs of a company, an organization and a country. This is in line with our definition of a high degree of autonomy, which is not fully autonomous. They are not allowed to exercise their diplomatic powers and manage national defense. It is evident that the translators use concrete and precise words to convey the meaning of the original and the method of combination to produce a tight sentence to convey information more powerfully.

Example 4: 亲清政商关系

Translation: a cordial and clean relationship between government and business

Analysis: It means a close and clean relationship between government officials and private companies. For leading cadres, the so-called “亲” means to candidly and sincerely contact and communicate with private enterprises, especially when private enterprises encounter difficulties and problems, to actively provide help and services, pay attention to the needs of private entrepreneurs, and vigorously support the development of private economy. And “清” means that the relationship with private entrepreneurs should be as clean and pure as water instead of using the power to seek personal gains and carry out power-money transactions. This kind of translation maintains a strong Chinese flavor. At the same time, the Chinese characters “亲” and “清” both start with q as a consonant, while the translated “cordial” and “clean” also start with c. It retains the feature of the source text’s alliteration and demonstrates the government’s concerns of the private companies, conveying the spirit and manner of the original.

Example 5: 表面文章

Translation: window dressing

Analysis: “表面” refers to appearance, “文章” refers to writing. This idiom means that it looks well written on the outside, but in reality it is empty, false or unrealistic. This idiom is often used to describe a person who is pretentious or false in speech or behavior, focusing on appearance rather than substance. This is an eastern cultural image, but there is no exact equivalent in the West. According to Nida’s theory of functional equivalence, if meaning and culture cannot be conveyed at the same time, translators have to abandon formal equivalence and reproduce the semantics and culture of the original text by changing the form of the original text in the target text. The original meaning of window dressing refers to the behavior of retail stores displaying products in the window to attract customers. The act of making something appear deceptive is used here by extension. The translators adopt free translation by choosing the image familiar to westerners instead of the original image. It is in line with western language habits and ensure an idiomatic and precise translated version, which is conducive for the target readers to produce the same response as the source readers.

3.2. *Translated Items of Economy*

Example 6: 增强区域发展平衡性协调性

Translation: achieved more balanced and coordinated regional development

Analysis: In the translation of The GWR(2023), “balanced” and “coordinated” are both adjectives. Due to the language differences in grammar and habits, the translators use conversion by translating two nouns into two adjectives. On the contrary, “enhancing the balance and coordination of regional development” is more abstract. “more balanced and coordinated” are the comparatives in order to emphasize the effect of augment. There is no doubt that the latter version is more fluent and natural-sounding.

Example 7: 区间调控、定向调控、相机调控、精准调控

Translation: range-based, targeted, well-timed, and precision regulation

Analysis: “相机调控” emphasizes the need for the government to be flexible in deciding and choosing which policy measure or measures should be adopted at present, based on the market situation and the characteristics of the various regulatory measures. “Well-timed” means done or happening at the right time or at an appropriate time. If translated directly and mechanically, readers of the target language text may not understand the meaning of this term, and a host of explanations are needed. Conversely, “well-timed” is succinct and finds a suitable equivalent in the Western context. In addition, “区间调控、定向调控、相机调控、精准调控” are all verb phrases. This reflects the Chinese preference for verbs and the characteristic of “dynamic”. While English prefers nouns, “regulation” reflects the “static” characteristics of the English language. Conversion and compounds like ranged-based and well-timed offer a more fluent and convenient translated version for the target language readers to read and understand, which is in line with the language habits of the target language audience in western countries, takes into account the needs of the target language readers, and completes the equivalence in content and meaning.

Example 8: 六稳、六保

Translation: ensure stability on six fronts and security in six areas

Analysis: The six fronts refer to employment, the financial sector, foreign trade, foreign investment, domestic investment, and expectations. The six areas refer to job security, basic living needs, operations of market entities, food and energy security, stable industrial and supply chains, and the normal functioning of primary-level institutions. The six areas refer to job security, basic living needs, operations of market entities, food and energy security, stable industrial and supply chains, and the normal functioning of primary-level governments. The “六稳”, “六保” were proposed in 2018. After a few years, the domestic and foreign environments have become more familiar with the concept, which is abbreviated as “ensure stability on six fronts and security in six areas”. This version is concise and accurate, while at the same time reflecting respect for the culture of the source language.

3.3. *Translated Items of People's Wellbeing*

Example 9: 两不愁三保障

Translation: to meet the basic food and clothing needs of poor people and see that they had access to compulsory education, basic medical services, and safe housing and drinking water

Analysis: This term is both a typical, highly generalised numerical term, and a characteristic term based on China's national conditions and the current state of social life. In order to translate this term accurately, the translators must understand its real meaning. The term was coined in the context of the CPC's efforts to lift the people out of poverty in the countryside. The term “两不愁” refers to the stable realization that the rural poor do not have to worry about food and clothing; the term “三保障” refers to the guarantee of compulsory education, basic medical care and housing security, which are the basic requirements and core indicators for the rural poor to get rid of poverty. Therefore, this expression is mainly about the issue of livelihood security for people in poverty-stricken areas. Without a certain understanding of the social context, the target readers may have an unnecessary misunderstanding. The theory of functional equivalence holds that translation should achieve basic equivalence between the target readers' response to the target text and the source language readers' response to the source language text. In this case, the translators adopt free translation through paraphrasing and adhere to the translation principles of faithfulness and accuracy. In terms of tone, with proper wording and sentence arrangements such as “see that”, the translation shows the government's close attention on people's wellbeing and its strong willingness and confidence in taking actions. The equivalence in tone enables readers of the targeted language texts to better comprehend the attitudinal tendency of the source texts.

Example 10: 兜住了困难群众基本生活保障网

Translation: secured the safety net for meeting the basic needs of people in difficulty

Analysis: The rhetorical technique of metaphor is used here, comparing the social security system to an all-encompassing net, emphasizing the high coverage of this basic livelihood protection. The translators translate the terms accurately by retaining this metaphor. Secure is a familiar word used as a verb. Its English interpretation is “to get something, sometimes with difficulty”. Much weight is attached to the strong support of the government that rid people of worries in tone. The lexical equivalence in polysemy is realized in meaning first and style second between the source and

target language texts. This also informs us that when we study the translation of political texts, we should endeavour to expand our vocabulary and master the multiple meanings of words so that we can understand and apply them to ensure word accuracy.

Example 11: 打好蓝天、碧水、净土保卫战

Translation: work to keep our skies blue, waters clear, and lands clean

Analysis: The phrase refers to a strategy of ecological environmental protection and pollution prevention which is to strengthen the comprehensive control of pollutants, basically eliminate heavily polluted weather, coordinate the management of water resources, water environment and water ecology, promote the ecological protection and management of important rivers, lakes and reservoirs, basically eliminate black-smelling water bodies in cities, strengthen the prevention and control of soil pollution at source and carry out the treatment of new pollutants, upgrade the level of environmental infrastructure construction and promote the improvement of urban and rural habitats. This is an important measure for China in ecological and environmental governance. If the translator lacks the appropriate background knowledge, then it may be assumed to create unnecessary misunderstandings or even give rise to international disputes over territory. In addition, “打好蓝天、碧水、净土保卫战” reflects the left-branching feature of the Chinese sentence, while “work to keep our skies blue, waters clear, and lands clean” reflects the right-branching feature of the English sentence. “blue” “clear” and “clean” correspond respectively to the adjectives “蓝”“碧”“净”. The translators adopt infinitive to enable readers of the targeted language texts to read the sentence more fluently and naturally. This is in line with the language habits, and also takes into account the needs of the target language readers, pursuing as much as possible the equivalence of content and form.

3.4. Translated Items of Culture

Example 12: 渡过难关、留得青山

Translation: overcome difficulties and stay afloat

Analysis: The allusion is clearly used in the source language text with strong Chinese characteristics and cultural traits. The saying “留得青山在，依旧有柴烧” is an idiom, and it implies the idea that if we can keep the most fundamental conditions, other problems can be solved. This is a classic cultural image. Its corresponding translation “afloat” means “having enough money to pay debts; able to survive”. The meaning of the original text here is to help enterprises reduce their burden through tax cuts and fee reductions. In this case, the translators use free translation to grasp the core meaning of the original cultural image, which is a boon for the readers of the target language to produce the same reading response as the readers of the source language.

Example 13: 不搞大水漫灌

Translation: while refraining from adopting a deluge of strong stimulus policies

Analysis: Farmland flooding is an irrigation method used in agricultural production. China is a traditional agricultural country with a long history of agricultural civilization. Flooding is a traditional method of agricultural irrigation in China. Farmers heavily rely on the weather, hardly ditch in fields, letting the water roam on the ground to moisten the soil. This is a relatively crude irrigation method. In western countries, driven by the industrial revolution, most of them implement large-scale

agricultural operation, mechanised modern agriculture. Drip irrigation and sprinkler irrigation are more commonly used in agriculture. “Deluge” has two meanings. One is a sudden very heavy fall of rain. The second is a large number of things that happen and arrive at the same time. The phrase “a deluge of “ depicts the enormous size of hasty stimulus policies in a vivid and concrete matter, which conveys the spirit and manner of the original cultural image and information precisely. Meanwhile, the translators use amplification to add “strong stimulus policies” to make it fit into the habits of the targeted language.

Example 14: 河湖长制、林长制

Translation: systems of river, lake, and forest chiefs

Analysis: “河长” is an organisation and official in charge of water conservation and management in China. Dayu replaces his father in governing the Yellow River. This is the famous Dayu flood control. Su Shi, a great writer in Song Dynasty, was also appointed as the “湖长”, and he managed the silt of West Lake in Hangzhou during his tenure. This corresponding translation is the new connotation given to systems of river, lake, and forest chiefs in the new era. It indicates that local party chiefs at all levels are responsible for organising and leading the management and protection of the corresponding rivers, lakes, and forests. This translated version employs literal translation, which preserves the tradition of the Chinese culture and conveys an accurate message, achieving equivalence of meaning.

4. Conclusions

In order to justify the validity and necessity of the functional equivalence theory applied to Chinese characteristic vocabulary in GWR, this paper applies the functional equivalence theory to conduct an illustrative study of words with Chinese characteristics in The GWR (2023), and reaches the following findings: Firstly, this study provides the latest evidence for the application scope of the theory of functional equivalence, provokes new thinking for the research angle of Chinese characteristic vocabulary and plays a guiding role for translators to study vocabulary with Chinese characteristics. It applies the classification method to classify the selected Chinese characteristic words into four sections, namely, politics, economy, people’s wellbeing and culture based on the topic standard, and adopts the research to review the theory of functional equivalence and provides a sound theoretical basis, and finally selects typical examples to analyse and summarize the methods of translating the Chinese characteristic words. Secondly, this study acts as a catalyst for telling China’s stories well and spreading Chinese culture to the world. In translating The GWR (2023), vocabulary with Chinese characteristics, translators can practice the translation strategies of domestication and foreignization, and foreignization is gaining in popularity, which is a booster to cross-cultural exchanges among different nations and demonstrates China’s cultural consciousness and confidence needed to implement the strategy of developing a strong culture. The translation methods of vocabulary with Chinese characteristics are mainly comprised of literal translation and free translation together with other translation methods such as conversion, amplification, combination and so on. In a nutshell, this study justifies the practical feasibility and guidance of Nida’s functional equivalence theory on the C-E translation of the vocabulary with Chinese characteristics in The GWR (2023).

Due to the limited corpus and the research time, this paper inevitably has some limitations. Firstly, this paper attempts to study the words with Chinese characteristics

in The GWR (2023) without taking into consideration the syntactic, chapter and stylistic perspectives which causes relatively narrow research aspects. Second, this paper only selects the latest typical examples from The GWR (2023), so the data collection lacks comprehensiveness. Third, the author's limited professional knowledge leads to a possible lack of profound analysis of the vocabulary with Chinese characteristics, and a certain degree of subjectivity in the interpretation and understanding of the corpus. Fourth, the results need to be supported by a huge sample size because of the extensive and profound Chinese culture. Together with the political sensitivity of political texts, the sample size is insufficient. However, it is hoped that the research methodology and content of this paper can provide convenience and help for subsequent related studies.

Based on the above analyses, the suggestions for future research are as follows. Firstly, similar studies can start from multiple perspectives, such as syntactic, chapter, and stylistic levels. Secondly, the researcher can expand data for the study by selecting statistics from the last ten years or even longer for longitudinal study. It is also possible to select different types of political texts for horizontal comparative studies to make research more adequate and creditable.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article.

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