

The Concern for TL readers in the Translation of Political Documents from the Perspective of Reader Reception Theory

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Abstract

The English translation of political documents has long been an important window for western countries to get access to Chinese governing policies and strategies. From the perspective of Reader Reception Theory, the paper analyzes the translation strategies and concern for TL readers in the translation of political documents in the translation of current typical political documents. It is found that its English version attaches great importance to the consideration of cultural psychology of the target readers, and it also achieves the goal of bridging the cultural and expressing differences between Chinese and English and eliminating reading barriers by using many feasible translation strategies. It is expected to shed light on the translation of political documents for the purpose of foreign dissemination.

Keywords

Reader Reception Theory; Political documents; The concern for TL readers; Translation strategies.

1. Introduction

Political document translation is an important way of publicity and one of the most important ways for foreign readers to get access to Chinese governing policies and strategies. The quality of translations is not only related to whether readers can accurately grasp the relevant information in the document, but also, to a large extent, it affects the establishment of a country's international image. However, the current typical political documents cover all aspects of socialism with Chinese characteristics, as well as a large number of political expressions with Chinese characteristics. All these will make western readers who know little about Chinese culture have certain reading barriers. Reception theory originated in the 1960s is a literary criticism theory under the reader-centered paradigm proposed by H.R. Jauss of the Federal Republic of Germany. The unique hermeneutic perspective and sharp criticism of reception theory have brought new inspiration to translation studies (Deng Yan, 2011). At present, there are relatively few studies on the translation strategies of political documents from the perspective of Reader Reception Theory. Under the guidance of reader reception theory, the paper analyzes the translation strategies and concern for TL readers in the translation of political documents in the translation of current typical political documents. It is aimed at providing references for the translation of political documents for the purpose of publicity, and to help the world gain a better understanding of Chinese governing policies and strategies.

2. Reader Reception Theory and Political Documents Translation

2.1. Reader Reception Theory

Beginning in the 1960s, Reception Theory, also known as "Aesthetics of Reception", is one of the contemporary Western literary criticism theories. Reception Theory, represented by H.R.Jauss and Wolfgang Iser, advocated that the direction of literary research should shift from

the traditional author-centered relationship to the reader-centered relationship. And it is believed that the process of readers' reception of text is the process of re-creation of the text and also the process of literary works being truly realized (Deng Yan, 2011). There is no absolute explanation for the meaning of the text, and only through readers' reading can the meaning of the text be realized (Chen Jinlian, 2016).

2.2. Linguistic Features and Translation of Political Documents

Political documents refer to documents issued by various state agencies about national and local development policies on social and economic. Political documents are characterized by formal language, standardized wording, rigorous structure, careful logic, and strong reasoning (Tan Wanwen, 2013). In the current typical political documents, the content often covers all aspects of socialism with Chinese characteristics, and also involves a large number of expressions and political terms with Chinese characteristics. In addition, the political discourse system that has been formed in China for a long time is unique, with the characteristics of high generalization, distinctiveness of the times, comprehensive coverage and popular language (Xie Li and Wang Yinquan, 2018).

The translation of political documents is different from the translation of general cultural works which mainly considers whether readers can understand and grasp the meaning of articles, while political document translation not only has the problem of understanding, but also focuses on whether the target language readers can accept it, including the acceptance of both the language and political content (Dou Weilin, 2016).

Most foreign readers of Chinese political documents are those whose language habits and cultural traditions are quite different from China. Therefore, in order to prevent foreign readers from misinterpreting Chinese governing policies, it requires translators to grasp the sense of propriety, improve political sensitivity, and accurately position the cultural traditions of target language readers. Therefore, the translation of political documents should fully consider the target language readers, not only to fully understand the huge differences between Chinese and English culture and expression, but also to be clear about preferences and expectations of target language readers.

2.3. Political Documents Translation from the Perspective of Reader Reception Theory

According to opinions of Reception Theory, translation is also a kind of reader's interpretation, which is the interpretation of people with certain cultural and artistic qualities under the background of a specific history. The translation itself cannot create independent meanings, but the complete completion of the translation can only be achieved through the reading of readers themselves. The recreation process of the translation is the acceptance process of the readers (Gong Guifang, 2007). Therefore, in order to ensure the publicity effect of the translated version, in the process of translation, the translator should give full consideration to the target language readers, and the translation should be actively in line with the cultural psychology, way of thinking and language expression habits of target language readers. Only in this way can the translation be more easily accepted by the target language readers and have more social influence.

3. The Concern for TL Readers in the Translation of Political Documents from the Perspective of Reader Reception Theory

3.1. Dispelling Doubts and Confusion of Readers, and Removing Reading Barriers

Most foreign readers have little or no understanding of cultural concepts with Chinese characteristics, and it is even more difficult for them to comprehend the rich ideological content contained in cultural concepts, so they often encounter the problem of cultural defaults in translation (Si Xianzhu, Zeng Jianping, 2021). The so-called cultural default refers to the omission of relevant cultural background knowledge shared by both sides (Wang Dalai, 2014). In cross-cultural communication, cultural default can lead to reading barriers of target language readers. For this reason, it is necessary to make semantic compensation for cultural defaults during translation, and to construct a target language context that is helpful for target language readers to read and understand. There are many cultural words with Chinese characteristics in the current typical political documents, including abbreviations expressing the idea of governing strategies, as well as ancient poems, idioms and allusions with rich cultural connotations. During the process of translation, the translator mainly adopts the translation strategies of amplification and explicitation, and fully explains the unique cultural concepts of China, which removes reading barriers for the target language readers to effectively interpret China's governing strategies and profound culture.

3.1.1. Adding Time to Dynasties and Important Events

Since the target language readers do not have a clear concept of time for major events in China or the beginning of dynasties, it is necessary to add time during translation to help the target language readers understand Chinese culture and eliminate their knowledge blind spot. For example:

(1) 我一直在思考，为什么从明末清初开始，我国科技渐渐落伍了。（习近平，2014）

I have been wondering about the reason why our science and technology gradually lagged behind from the late Ming (1368-1644) and early Qing (1644-1911) dynasties.

Amplification is adopted to this example by adding the time of Ming and Qing dynasties respectively. During the process of translation, adding time to each major event or dynasty can make the target language readers have a clearer understanding of Chinese history and culture, and eliminate the translation barriers caused by knowledge blind spots.

3.1.2. Completing the Abbreviations

On the one hand, abbreviations are encyclopedic and condense rich cultural information. On the other hand, they often appear repeatedly in the text because they can simplify language expressions. However, when it first appeared, it was often necessary to complete the in-text information or add extra-text information to make the meaning clear (Si Xianzhu and Zeng Jianping, 2021). For example:

(2) 各成员国相关部门也应该建立日常信息沟通渠道，探讨联合行动方式，合力打击“三股势力”，为本地区各国人民生活创造良好环境。（同上）

The relevant authorities within the member states should also open up a channel for routine communication, and explore ways to act and work together to combat terrorism, separatism and extremism so as to create a sound working and living environment for the peoples of this region.

3.1.3. Expliciting the Underlying Meaning

Explicitation, also called clarification, refers to a straightforward explanation of the underlying meaning when the original expression is implicit and difficult for the target language readers

to understand, so as to make the meaning of translation more clear and facilitate the understanding and reception of the target language readers. For example:

(3) 既深刻剖析和检查自己, 又开展诚恳的相互批评, 触及思想和灵魂, 既红红脸、出出汗, 又明确整改方向。(同上)

Party members and officials should not only conduct in-depth analysis and examination of themselves, but also share genuine criticism of each other to touch the mind and soul. Their reddened faces and sweat that so result will bring a host of problems into the open, and show the direction towards rectification.

The language of the original text is relatively implicit. The Chinese idioms like“红红脸”, “出出汗”have no corresponding expressions in English. Therefore, in order to properly convey the meaning of the original text, explicitation is adopted. The implicit information of the source language is explained, so that the target language readers can easily obtain clear information and understand the meaning of the original language.

3.2. Bridging Expression Differences and Conforming to Language Habits of TL Readers

English and Chinese belong to different language families, and there are striking differences in vocabulary, syntax and logical thinking expressions. These differences are all factors that need to be considered in the process of political document translation.

3.2.1. From "Redundant" to "Concise"

Compared with Chinese, English expressions are more concise. In the current political documents, many expressions often use four-character idioms or neatly arranged parallel sentences, which makes the sentences more cadenced and powerful. In the translation process of these parallel and synonymous structures, omission is often adopted to make the translation more concise, so that the translated text is more in line with the expression habits of the target language readers. For example:

(4) 给大家拜个晚年, 祝大家马年吉祥、一马当先、马到成功! (习近平, 2014)

I wish you all a happy New Year and every success!

(5) 要防止和克服地方和部门保护主义、本位主义, 决不允许“上有政策, 下有对策”, 决不允许有令不行、有禁不止, 决不允许在贯彻执行中央决策部署上打折扣、做选择、搞变通。(同上)

We must prevent or, if necessary, rectify departmental and local protectionism and parochialism, and never allow local policies to trump central policies, the sidelining of government decrees or prohibitions, or perfunctory or selective enforcement of or accommodations in the enforcement of the central leadership's policy decisions and plans.

The above examples all adopt omission, which makes the translation more concise and smooth by simplifying the structure of parallel and synonym repetition in the original text.

3.2.2. From "Repetitive" to "Variable"

Generally speaking, Chinese people like repeating words, while English advocates variable use of words. In the report of the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, the word "创新" which means innovation, appeared repeatedly, which was difficult for western readers to accept, and the translation could not well fulfill the function of publicity. Therefore, according to the context, in addition to using innovation, the translation version also translates it into: new, creative, develop and others to achieve flexible expression and conform to the language expression habits of target language readers. For example:

(6) 自主创新 conduct innovations independently

创新对外投资方式 develop new ways of making outbound investments

党的创新理论武装头脑 arm themselves with the Party's new theories

创新思维 develop creative thinking

3.3. Focusing on Cultural Differences and Strive to Faithfully Replace

The differences between Chinese and Western cultures lead to diametrically opposite understandings of certain images on both sides. In order to avoid misunderstandings and conflicts at the cultural level, in the translation process of current typical political documents, the translator chooses to replace such images, and strives to faithfully replace them, so as to achieve the purpose of conveying the original text information positively and conforming to the cultural psychology of the target language readers. For example:

(7) 坚持把国家主权和安全放在第一位, 坚持军事斗争准备的龙头地位不动摇。
(习近平, 2014)

It must put national sovereignty and security before any other consideration. Being "action ready" must be its major task.

Since ancient times, "Dragon" has always represented supreme power in Chinese culture, but in Western culture, dragon is the embodiment of evil and greed. If the original text is literally translated here, it will easily lead to negative associations, and it cannot accurately convey the important position of "action ready". Therefore, the translation here adopts the free translation method to avoid misreading of the English version.

4. Conclusion

Political document translation is of great significance. The quality of the translation affects the international image of the government or country, and determines whether foreign readers can accurately understand a country's governing policies and political attitudes towards international affairs. The successful translation of political documents, which has become a model for telling Chinese stories and building bridges between China and foreign countries, is undoubtedly inseparable from the efforts of numerous excellent translators in the process of external publicity. In the process of translation, the translator fully considers the acceptability of the readers, takes concerns of the cultural psychology of the target language readers, and adopts a variety of flexible and feasible translations, such as amplification, omission, explicitation, and rearrangement according to the specific context. These strategies bridges the cultural and expressing differences between Chinese and English, meet the thinking habits of foreign readers, accurately conveying the meaning of the original text, eliminating the translation reading barrier, and maximizing the effect of external publicity.

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