

Analysis of Chinese Four-character Chinese-English Interpreting Strategies for Press Conferences from The Perspective of Skopos Theory: A Case Study of Premier Li Keqiang's Press Conference from 2020 to 2022

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Abstract

In China, every year during the “Two Sessions”, the Premier of the State Council will hold a press conference for Chinese and foreign journalists. Chinese leaders often use catchy, rhythmic, innovative and concise Chinese four-characters. Based on Skopos theory and the introduction of Chinese four-character cases, this paper takes the four-character case interpretation texts of Premier Li Keqiang's Chinese and foreign press conferences from 2020 to 2022 as the research object, and explores its interpretation strategies with the aim of accurately expressing the position and attitude of the Chinese government.

Keywords

The Skopos Theory; Chinese four-characters; Press Conference; Interpreting Strategy.

1. Introduction

Chinese four-character structure is a unique lexical phenomenon in Chinese and the crystallization of Chinese language art. As the name implies, the four-character structure is composed of four Chinese characters. The internal combination relationship of four-character structure is relatively stable. Its content is concise and comprehensive, the form is neat and uniform, the voice is smooth and pleasant, and the expression effect is vivid. It is called an interpretation killer because it has few English equivalents of structure and meaning, which makes Chinese English translation more difficult. Therefore, in the case of limited time, it is a challenge for interpreters to accurately and concisely interpret the Chinese four character structure.

The Chinese four-character structure is often used by state leaders in official occasions such as conference speeches and press conferences because of its short, compact, rigorous, rhythmic and expressive features. At the end of the two sessions in March every year, the Premier's Press Conference, as the last one, will always attract attention from all walks of life, and the Premier's answers are always concise and fluent with ancient poems, idioms and proverbs, which are helpful in solving the acute problems one by one in a humorous way. In view of the particularity of on-site interpretation and Chinese four-character structure, the efforts to translate Chinese four-character structure into English have been greatly increased.

At present, the research on Chinese four character structure mainly focuses on translation, while the research on interpretation is less and less in-depth, and the research methods are also relatively simple. Therefore, there is still a lot of research space for the interpretation of Chinese four character structure, whether from the perspective of research or research methods. Although translation strategies can provide some reference for interpretation, due to the differences between interpretation and translation, some translation strategies cannot effectively solve the problems that may be encountered in interpretation practice.

Based on the interpretation corpus of 2020-2022 Premier's press conference, this study will combine the Chinese four-character structure interpretation texts of Premier Li Keqiang's Press Conference from 2020 to 2022, and make a comparison. It analyzes the four main interpreting strategies used by interpreters by means of analysis and case study, with an emphasis on each detailed usage of these strategies and the reasons for their usage. It is hoped that this paper can provide further information and enlightenment for those who study Chinese four-character structure interpretation.

2. Literature Review

2.1. A Brief Introduction to Interpreting

2.1.1. History and Development of Interpreting

Interpretation, as a formal profession, can be traced back to the beginning of the last century. After the Paris Peace Conference in 1919, the first group of official translators came into being, and then gradually developed and improved.

In primitive society, the economic and cultural activities of tribal groups belong to a kind of regional activities. The language barrier has obviously become the biggest barrier of this kind of cross-ethnic communication, and interpretation, as an intermediary language medium, can realize people's desire for economic and cultural exchanges with the outside world. Therefore, the construction of cross-cultural and cross-ethnic communication bridge oral translation came into being. For thousands of years, human interpretation activities have truthfully recorded people of all ethnic groups in the world's exchanges in politics, economy, military affairs, culture, science and technology, health, education, etc.

2.1.2. Classification of Interpreting

As for the classification of interpretation, there are different types.

Generally speaking, in terms of working methods, interpretation can be divided into consecutive interpretation (CD), simultaneous interpretation (SD), live interpretation and whisper interpretation. Consecutive interpretation and simultaneous interpretation are the two most commonly used forms. Consecutive interpretation refers to that the interpreter has completed some relevant sentences, or in most cases quite a long paragraph, immediately after the original text, if the interpreter is instructed to explain at the beginning of the speech, then we need to do simultaneous interpretation.

According to the specific settings of interpretation, there are conference interpretation, court interpretation, community interpretation, etc.

According to the subject area of interpretation, interpretation can include business interpretation, legal interpretation and media interpretation, diplomatic Interpretation, tour guide interpretation, etc. Since this paper discusses the Press Conference, in the next part, the author will focus on consecutive interpretation.

2.2. A Brief Introduction to Press Conference

2.2.1. Definition of Press Conference

Press conference, also known as press conference, is a special meeting for social organizations or individuals, according to their own needs, to invite journalists, editors, hosts and social audiences of relevant news units to announce a certain news and accept questions from participants.

2.2.2. Differences between Press Conference Interpretation and Other Conference Interpretation

Official Press Conference is directly organized by the government for the media to elaborate an issue or to organize an activity of great significance. Its four distinctive features display as

follows,1)A kind of impromptu bilingual activity-need the interpreter to possess superb impromptu flexibility and fluent impromptu expression ability;2)The on-site interpreting of Press Conference is a formal activity, and its serious atmosphere poses great psychological pressure on the interpreter and the ever-changing atmosphere will influence the normal performance of the interpreter;3)The ability of individual and linguistic comprehensive ability-the interpreter shall cope with various problems independently without the help of other persons or materials, as the listeners all based on his/her interpreting and have the high ability of reading, speaking, listening, writing and interpreting;4)Extensiveness of the information exchange- as the professional interpreter,he/she should have a excellent understanding of various domains;5) Authoritative of the spokesman, on behalf of the government, issues the news and answers the reporters' questions. Therefore, the interpreting requires high quality without any mistakes. Otherwise, the information conveyed by the Press Conference would be wrongly absorbed by the mass media, and may even cause negative effects on the image of the government.

2.3. General Description of Chinese Four-Character Structure

2.3.1. Definition of Chinese Four-Character Structure

Lu Zhiwei, a famous linguist in China, put forward the concept of the four character case in the paper "the four character case of Chinese Juxtaposition". He understood the four character case in a broad sense, and thought that the four character case is the combination of four words, and the form can be words or phrases. Lv Shuxiang classified the four character case as a phrase. In 1987, Ma Guofan discussed the formation of four character lattices clearly in his essay on four character lattices, including the types, external forms, connotations and the current situation of four character lattices. He thinks that in terms of external form, the four character case is "a language unit composed of four syllables", and he roughly divides the four character case into six categories, including the extension of words and words, the contraction of phrases, loose phrases, industry idioms, idioms, and the evolution of idioms. Four character structures are generally composed of four morphemes in the two parts. Structurally, the four character case is composed of free phrases and fixed phrases. Free phrases mainly refer to ordinary four character phrases, including four character phrases which are temporarily combined according to the context. Ordinary four character phrases are not fixed in form, and can be freely combined according to different context needs. Fixed phrases refer to four character idioms in Chinese, that is, four character idioms.

2.3.2. Classification of Chinese Four-Character Structure

Four-character structure has the advantages of avoiding the boundary between words and phrases, but also has some disadvantages. Apart from the common points of the external forms, the Chinese four-character structure is a kind of internal structure with different characteristics. On the four character interpreting in Premier Li Keqiang's Press Conference from the perspective of Skopos Theory can be roughly divided into four categories.

1. Idioms

Most idioms are four words, this takes up the vast majority of Chinese four-character. Many new idioms begin with four characters. The form of the word case existed and later developed into idioms.

2. Contraction of words

Most of them are proper nouns, which are originally phrases in structure and function as one word. Later lose the original appearance of the phrase. For example,"人大代表","节能减排"; there are also four words.

3. Loose phrases

That is, general phrases with loose internal structure, such as "绿水青山","人民福祉","政策空间", etc.

4. Industry Formula

Some four character patterns have become common idioms or idioms in some industries for a long time. It has become an industry idiom. Such as: 偷税漏税, 先到先得, 保质保量, etc.

2.3.3. Characteristics of Chinese Four-Character Structure

Four-Character structures are compact and concise because they are highly specific in meaning and usually convey a broader meaning. Because of this feature, four character phrases are easy to remember and easy to use. But it's a good proof that the characteristics of Chinese four character phrases are compact.

1. Compactness

Four character phrases are compact and concise because they are highly specific in meaning, usually expressing a broader meaning with only Four characters. Because of this feature, four character phrases are easy to remember and convenient for people to use. This feature also brings us the greatest difficulty in translating Chinese four character phrases into English. For example, "政贵有恒" can be translated into "We must keep our policies stable and ensure their continuity". It can be seen that these four words have been extended to 10 words in English, compactness of Chinese four character structures.

2. Syllable Beauty

Because Chinese is monosyllabic, so rhyme is through a rhyming character. A four character phrase or a parallel or separate USC. It also explains harmony. Our ancestors added additional function words and created four word phrases. For four character phrases are in parallel or in groups, rhyming is well obtained between the last few characters of several phrases. For example, in "两岸同胞同根相系, 我们愿出台更多的优惠政策","根"and "系" share the same rhymes.

3. Varied Figures of Speech

We can find a series of rhetorical devices in four character phrases, such as simile, metaphor, personification, parallelism, antithesis, and rhetoric. For instance, in "各级政府应当从善如流"and "从善如流" is a metaphor. In "此情此景, 如履薄冰", "如履薄冰" is a metaphor. The purpose of parallelism is to achieve coherence and strength.

3. Theoretical Framework

3.1. Skopos Theory

3.1.1. Basic Concepts of Skopos Theory

3.1.1.1 Definition of Skopos Theory

Skopos Theory is a theory that applies Skopos concept to translation. According to Skopostheorie, the primal principle that determines the whole translation process is the Skopos(purpose) of the overall translational action.

3.1.1.2 Principles of Skopos Theory

1. Skopos Rule

According to Skopos theory, the primary principle of all translation activities is Skopos theory, translation should be conducted in the way desired by the recipient of the target language. Purpose determines the whole process, that is to say, the result of translation determines the method of translation. However, translation activities have a variety of purposes, which can be divided into three categories :(1) the basic purpose of the translator; (2) the communicative purpose of translation; (3) the purpose achieved through special translation methods.

Therefore, in a specific translation context, the translator should make clear his own specific translation purpose and decide whether to adopt literal translation, free translation or translation method between them.

2. Coherence Rule

Coherence rule refers to that the translation has readability and acceptability, which enables the receiver to understand and make sense in the target culture and the communicative context in which the translation is used.

3. Fidelity Rule

Fidelity rule is equivalent to the so-called faithfulness to the original in other translation theories, but the degree and form of faithfulness depend on the purpose of translation and the translator's understanding of the original.

Loyalty Rule

This is from Nord. She found that skopos theory has two defects: first, due to the different cultural patterns, people from different cultural backgrounds have different views on translation; In addition, if the principle of purpose is contrary to the intention of the original author, we should abide by the principle of purpose and violate the principle of fidelity. Therefore, Nord proposed the principle of fidelity to solve the relationship between cultural differences and translation participants.

3.1.2. Significance of Skopos Theory

First of all, in the traditional translation theory, the first consideration is the psychological response of the original text and the original readers, while in the Skopos Theory, the psychological response of the original text and the original readers are all returned to the secondary position and replaced by the issue of translation purpose and faithfulness. Secondly, the principle of equivalence is the basis of translation theory of linguistic school. Skopos Theory makes translation standards more diversified, while the diversity of translation standards makes translation closer to reality. Thirdly, Skopos Theory has explored new means to study. Finally, functionalist theory helps people to develop translation criticism. As Skopos Theory breaks through the traditional mode of translation theory and is an external study of translation, it can undoubtedly make up for the shortcomings of traditional translation studies, thus adding a new perspective for the exploration of translation discipline.

3.2. The Principles and Difficulties in Chinese Four-Character Structures' Interpreting

3.2.1. Principles

3.2.1.1 Beauty in Sense

"Sense" not only refers to the artistic expression of the author's works, but also refers to the inner aesthetics of the readers' feelings, experiences and interests in real life. In these three kinds of beauty, translator should realize that beauty in the sense is the most significant, the second important principle is the beauty of sound, and last but not least, he should pay attention to the form of sound.

"Meaning" is the center of Chinese cultural and artistic creation in literary translation, "meaning" refers to the poet's own sensitive thoughts and strong translating emotions into poetry and literature through imagination. The better the translation, the less beautiful the original translation should fail. Therefore, in order to show the beauty in the sense, the translator should not limited to the surface form of the source text, he needs to break the surface structure.

3.2.1.2 Beauty in Sound

Because Chinese is monosyllabic, there are many homophones in Chinese, so it is easy for a poet to share the same rhyme in his poems, while English is polyphonic, so there are many difficulties in Chinese English.

Another notable feature of Chinese is the overlapping words. Because this is an important figure of speech. In Chinese language, people like to use heavy words in literary works. In English, overlap is the repetition of syllabic morphemes or words.

There are two identical syllables that make up an unaccented rhythm. This is the same rhythm as the heartbeat. Therefore, compared with other syllables, overlapping words are easier to read, because overlapping words have a sense of harmony and rhythm. Overlapping words have been musical for thousands of years, which may explain why they have been in human language for so many years. Therefore, the translator should also pay attention to using sound to translate overlapping words in the process of translation.

3.2.1.3 Beauty in Form

The definition of form is a non-narrow concept, including the length of line, poetic form, structural opposition and parallelism. The formal beauty is to point to maintain the original formal beauty as far as possible, we put the formal beauty principle in the last, not to say that this principle is not as important as the other two principles, but because it is really in the sense and sound upload delta, not just in the form of the original expression of the United States. In translation, in order to maintain this point, we make a summary of the study of translation aesthetics. On the basis of the theory of translation aesthetics, we can choose the appropriate one principle of translation. Professor Xu Yuanhong put forward the "three beauty principles", namely meaning beauty, sound beauty and form beauty in principle, translators should put forward appropriate translation strategies. Based on these principles, the third chapter will show the translation strategies of four Chinese characters phrases.

3.2.2. Difficulties

3.2.2.1 Differences between Chinese and English

There are many differences between Chinese and English. Friedrich, a translator and philosopher, believes that the further apart languages are, the less likely they are to resemble each other both in time and geography. A word in one language is completely corresponding to a word in another language.

For Chinese four-character structures, how to express them is a big challenge. In addition, many of them are culture specific. Chinese phrases are compact and concise in meaning. When translated into English, because there is no correspondence in English, translators often add new words to present culture specific phrases, including literal meaning and deeper meaning, and then translators are forced to adopt various strategies to convey them. In many cases, this success is the cost of losing the original image. In addition, Chinese four character phrases are structurally balanced and have rhythm in the form of sound. Most of them are metaphorical.

Due to its rich stylistic features and various rhetorical devices, it has a strong appeal in effect, which brings great difficulties to translation. Four character translation, on the one hand, we should faithfully convey the original content, on the other hand, we hope to convey the style and soul of the original as much as possible.

3.2.2.2 Instantaneity in Consecutive Interpreting

Immediacy is an important requirement for translators. In continuous interpreting (CD), the interpreter must respond within 2-3 seconds, finish a speech and present it to the target audience in another language. At the same time, simultaneous interpretation is more demanding. In our research, we only focus on consecutive interpretation. It is a great challenge for translation to respond in such a short time.

According to W.A. Wickelgren (1979), a cognitive psychologist, there is indeed a relationship between speed and precision. However, the performance of translation must consider the complexity of information. Based on the experiment of David sun (1999), there are several constraints that increase the processing complexity of interpretation, thus prolonging the failure time difference (ITD). When the whole discourse is complex or unfamiliar with metaphors and difficult to understand keywords, the transition period will increase. This constraint

Generally, it can adapt to any language well. Secondly, when the structural differences between the two languages are too large, the transition period will also increase. Just like Chinese and English, it is not easy to explain two completely different language systems. Thirdly, in Chinese-English translation, the transition period is relatively large. This is the characteristic of the two languages. Generally speaking, Chinese is more concise in meaning, especially the four character structure. The greater the interpreter's psychological pressure is, the greater the translation pressure is, and the greater the psychological pressure is, the worse the overall performance is.

4. Interpretation Strategies of Chinese Four-Character Structure in Press Conference from the Perspective of Skopos Theory

Premier Li Keqiang's speech at the press conference was highly condensed and meaningful. Therefore, in order to fully convey this information to the foreigners present, even the journalists from all over the world cannot translate word by word. According to teleology, the principle of purpose is the best high principle. So interpreters should convey semantics, not the language itself. The interpreter has to understand it's words, make them clear, and then reformat them and deliver them in the target language. This paper will analyze the interpretation of the press conference and find a reasonable interpretation based on teleology.

4.1. Omission

Omission refers to the elimination of unnecessary linguistic units according to the needs of logic, syntax and rhetoric. Omission is not to delete part of the original text, but to avoid repetitive and tedious text, so as to make the translation more concise and more consistent with the habit of using English.

The language seems to omit some words without affecting the original meaning. Chinese vocabulary is rich, but in English, they will become cumbersome, affecting the overall readability of the language. Omission is the removal of unnecessary words and elements without destroying the meaning. Omission will help foreign readers understand the meaning of the Chinese language and help them understand the meaning of the Chinese language.

The examples are as follows.

Example 1:

Fundamental Policy

"大政方针" is a typical intertextuality idiom in Chinese, in this type of idiom, the first and the third character and the second and the fourth character are of the same meaning. Chinese people just use four characters to achieve the symmetric rhythm. Both "大政" and "方针" means policy, so we just interpret fundamental policy instead of interpreting two policies. "同心协力" is interpreted to unite the efforts and "兴高采烈" is interpreted to with much excitement.

Example 2:

Mutually Reinforcing

The former part "相辅" and the latter part "相成" are the same in meaning. Actually, "相成" is the cut side performance of "相辅", so the interpreter used omission as strategy, omitting "exit

side by side and play a part together". The interpreter omitted this idiom and focused more on the introduction of the government's mutual reinforcing, which is the crux of the journalist's question and the significance of the answer to the audiences.

Besides, when the text has shown the meaning of the idiom, the idiom needn't to be interpreted at all. By doing this, the redundancy, flashy and superfluous words can be avoided and make the target language more readable and consistent with the language meaning.

The interpreter verbalized the meaning from source language to accurately express the content and meaning as well, it can save the interpreter's time. The most important thing, content is fully delivered, which meets the requirement of Skopos Theory.

4.2. Generalization

As is said in the previous chapters, four-character structures are unique to the Chinese language and have distinct Chinese cultural characteristics. Sometimes interpreters can't find English equivalents or translate word for word because it is not easy for foreign audiences to understand. In this case, paraphrasing is a good choice. Paraphrasing is a method in which people pay more attention to producing a version that the target audience naturally accepts than to maintaining it the source language.

There are subtle differences between generalization and interpretation. Generalization makes the translation more concise, which can save the translator's translation time, be concise and bright, have a strong sense of rhythm, ensure the rhythm of the meeting, and reduce the waiting process of journalists.

It is often used to explain a particular culture or idiom. Paraphrasing can convey the implied meaning of the speaker and help foreign audiences understand, which is largely in line with the requirements of teleology. Typical examples are as follows.

Example 1:

这位记者朋友喜欢单刀直入，那我也开诚布公。

You went straight to the point in your question and I will not beat about the bush.

Here, "单刀直入" is interpreted into "you went straight to the point", giving up the original image while generalizing the intended meaning. "开诚布公" is interpreted into "I will not beat the bush", the interpreter generalized the meaning of the four-character.

Example 2:

“民生在勤，勤则不匮”。

A good life hinges on diligence. With diligence, one has no fear for shortages.

In this sentence, the interpreter generalized the meaning of these two four-characters, which is very simple and clear.

4.3. Literal Translation

Literal translation refers to some four-character structures with specific Chinese characteristics, which will make the translation readers unable to understand. Generalization also applies in this case, but the original image is lost during generalization. Therefore, literal translation and paraphrasing help to retain the source image while adding more contextual information, thus reducing the processing work on behalf of the target audience and introducing Chinese culture to the target audience. This approach is a compromise between faithfully and completely expressing the speaker's communicative intent while considering the acceptability of the audience. For example:

Example 1:

不管哪一个协议先达成，中方都乐见其成。

Whichever will be conducted first, China would welcome it.

As can be seen from the above example, the charm of the four character case is clear. It can make the Chinese and English language semantic equivalent, help foreign readers understand its meaning, which makes the difference between Chinese and English less obvious, and ensure the readability of the sentence.

Example 2:

这几年我们一直采用的是包容审慎的原则。

Our choice over the years is to exercise accommodative and prudential regulation.

The four-character phrase are rendered literally both in meaning and structure, achieving almost the same communicative effect in the target audience as that in the source audience. Therefore, this kind of rendition can be an ideal interpretation.

4.4. Borrowing

Borrowing is a fast and effective method of interpreting Chinese four-character structures, though there are great differences between Chinese and English, we can still find some similar expressions which are identical in the sense of both languages. This is because all human life experiences are overlapping and similar cultural elements. In this case, we can borrow similar things to express directly from the target language, so as to maintain a vivid image and achieve a sense of equivalence in effect. Some examples of this approach are as follows.

Borrowing is a very important translation method, which is adopted by most translators. It can not only make the translation concise and clear, but also fully clarify the meaning of the original text, so that the interpreter can not be bothered. Foreign readers can also quickly understand the meaning of the original text. Therefore, metonymy is a rare translation method.

Example 1:

民生方面的问题还很多，我们会抓住重点难点，尽力而为、量力而行去解决。

I do recognize that there are still a great deal of things the government should do in areas related to people's lives. We will do our level best within the realms of possibility to tackle the key concerns and difficulties that our people face.

The two phrases match in meaning though differ in form and image. The borrowing of an English phrase is to satisfy the needs of the audience and retain the central meaning intact at the same time.

Example 2:

半岛问题可以说是错综复杂、由来已久，解决起来不可能一蹴而就。

The Korean Peninsula issue is a long-standing and complicated one. It cannot be resolved overnight.

The Chinese four-character structure "一蹴而就" is rendered into "cannot be resolved overnight", a familiar English phrase to the English-speaking audiences. Therefore, the interpreter takes into consideration the acceptability level of the target audience and modifies the interpretation to their needs.

5. Conclusion

This paper studies the method of Chinese four-character interpretation at the press conference of the two sessions of the National People's Congress. After an introduction to interpretation and press conference, the author explains relative theory. Then the definition of four-word phrase and four-character phrase are introduced, and the difficulties of four-word phrase translation in the press conference are analyzed. On this basis, taking premier Li Keqiang's speech at the press conference of the "two sessions" as an example, this paper proposes four translation methods of four-character phrases from the perspective of Skopos Theory.

Through the research, the following main conclusions are drawn. First of all, according to the theory of interpretation, explanation is a form of communication activity rather than pure language conversion. Second, sense is the core of communication. According to teleology, the interpreter conveys the overall meaning of the source language rather than its linguistic form. After analyzing the characteristics of the interpretation difficulties in conference interpretation and four-word phrases at the press conference, the author discovered Skopos Theory can be used as an ideal method to translate four-word phrases in press conferences provide case-specific services in interpretation of press conferences. They're omission, generalization, literal translation and borrowing.

In conclusion, Skopos Theory can provide an insightful and meaningful guide to the practice of four-character structures' interpretation in press conferences. However, due to the author's limited ability, the research in this paper is not very ideal, and there is still a lot of room for improvement. This paper analyzes the interpretation of four-character phrases in press conferences by using the theory of language sense, in the hope of providing references for interpreters and interpretation learners to successfully translate four-character structures, encouraging translators to summarize successful experience, and making the interpretation theory more systematic and comprehensive.

There are three limitations of this study. Firstly, the theoretical framework is not representative enough, and the translation strategies induced by the theoretical framework do not fully cover the translation strategies used in the sample. Secondly, the number of corpus samples used in this study is not large enough to make full use of the translation strategies verified by corpus. At first, the author intends to dictate the audio frequency of premier's press conference from 2014 to 2019, and make qualitative and quantitative analysis based on the bilingual corpus. However, due to the large amount of work, which is beyond the research capacity, we have to give up. In the future, researchers can expand the sample and corpus, and test the hypothesis in various ways, so as to analyze the interpretation strategy of four character structure more objectively. In addition, this study fails to make a follow-up visit to the translator himself, and fails to fully consider the translator's psychological state in the context of the press conference, so it is impossible to make a more comprehensive analysis of the translator's strategy choice.

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