



Translation of Political Terms from the Perspective of Eco-Translatology

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Abstract

Political terminology constitutes codified expressions that convey institutional ideologies in diplomatic discourse. This study examines the English translation of key political terms from the 20th National Congress Report through the lens of Hu Gengshen's Eco-translatology. Adopting textual analysis and comparative assessment methodologies, the research identifies three adaptive translation strategies: linguistic functional equivalence, cultural conceptual mediation, and communicative discourse restructuring. Analysis of representative cases demonstrates how translators balance source-text fidelity with target-culture adaptability, achieving enhanced cross-cultural recognition while preserving ideological coherence. The findings propose an ecological decision-making framework that addresses the precision-adaptability paradox in political translation, offering both theoretical insights for translation studies and practical guidelines for China's international discourse construction.

Subject Areas

Linguistics

Keywords

Political Terminology, Eco-Translatology, Translation Eco-System

1. Introduction

1.1. Brief Introduction to Eco-Translatology

Eco-translatology [1], grounded in Darwinian adaptation theory, posits that translation constitutes an ecological process where translators make adaptive choices within specific linguistic, cultural and communicative environments. Its three-dimensional framework (linguistic, cultural, communicative) distinguishes itself from functionalist approaches by emphasizing dynamic ecosystem interactions.

The proposal of eco-translatology is firstly due to the global progress of human thought and the transformation of social civilization [2]. Since the 1960s, across the whole world, after finally realizing the serious pollution and destruction of the natural environment caused by the development of industrial civilization, people began to pay attention to the natural ecology. [1] Since then human civilization has gradually stepped into the eco-civilization stage from the industrial civilization stage, and the concept of ecology, which used to be neglected, has also gradually penetrated into the social civilization. Secondly, it is the inevitable result of the transformation of modern thought and philosophy. The evolving focus on ecological civilization reflects China's commitment to sustainable development, creating new demands for conceptual equivalency in political translation. Many philosophers have combined ecology with philosophy and put forward many ecological philosophical concepts, and it is such philosophical concepts that have opened up the thoughts of translation scholars on the study of translation activities, thus prompting the emergence of ecological translation studies.

In early times, the translation of political terminology in China was not ideal, and often lacked standards, resulting in multiple meanings and even mistranslations and omissions [3] For example, in 2012, General Secretary put forward the "Chinese Dream", which was translated differently in various official media, such as "the dream of China", "China Dream", "Chinese Dream", etc., with as many as 13 different translations [3].

1.2. Guiding Significance of Eco-Translatology in the Translation of Political Terminology

Ecological Translation Studies, through its theoretical framework of "three-dimensional transformation" (linguistic, cultural, and communicative dimensions), provides systematic support for political terminology translation [1]. It emphasizes that translators must achieve dynamic adaptation and balanced selection within the source and target language ecosystems. Taking the English translation of the 20th CPC National Congress Report as an example, "全过程人民民主" is rendered as "whole-process people's democracy." This translation preserves the dynamic implications of "全过程" through linguistic-dimensional adaptive selection, while supplementing cultural-dimensional explanations as "democracy in its broadest, most genuine, and most effective form." This approach breaks through Western monopolistic interpretations of "democracy" [4], reconstructing its ecological niche in the target context.

Another instance, "中国式现代化", translated as "Chinese path to modernization," replaces "model" with "path" to mitigate ideological confrontation [5]. This retains the core concept of the source text while aligning with target audiences' reception habits of development discourse through communicative-dimensional adaptation, exemplifying the "selective adaptation" principle of Ecological Translation Studies.

Theoretically, Ecological Translation Studies posits translation as an interactive process among "source text-translator-target environment. [6]" For instance, "自

我革命” is translated as “self-reform” rather than “self-revolution,” softening the combative connotations associated with “revolution” in Western contexts [4]. This choice prevents misinterpretation while conveying the innovation logic of governance systems, demonstrating translators’ responsibility as “cultural ecological conservators” in maintaining target-language ecological stability [7].

Furthermore, the evolution of “人类命运共同体” from “community of common destiny” to “a human community with a shared future” enhances emotional resonance through “shared future” while preserving the institutional connotations of “community.” This reflects translators’ anticipation of evolving international political discourse ecology [5], ensuring terminological sustainability in cross-cultural communication, thereby validating the “ecological chain extension” theory.

These practices demonstrate that Ecological Translation Studies establishes “meaning buffer zones” between heterogeneous cultures through linguistic sign reconstruction. Its “adaptation/selection” paradigm offers methodological support for political terminology translation that balances accuracy, acceptability, and ethical equilibrium [7].

2. Textual Analysis

Political terminology is significantly different from other terminologies and can be summarized in the following three features [3].

2.1. Epochal

Political terminology is mostly used to express policies, guidelines, regulations, and so on, which closely follow the development of the times with their own characteristics [8]. For example, new political terminology emerges every time a political event of great influence occurs in the country, such as the “Four Modernizations” during the Reform and Opening-up era and the “Two Hundred-Year Plan” proposed in the 1990s.

2.2. Comprehensive

Generalized political terminology can be roughly divided into three categories. One is a summary of the meaning of an excessively long statement, such as “combating illegal pornography publications and activities” (扫黄打非); the second is a generalization of the content of a policy using referential imagery, such as “fighting flies and tigers together” (苍蝇老虎一起打); and the last is a numerical generalization, such as “three representations” (三个代表). These terms are rich in meaning and scope, easy to pronounce and to publicize among the population.

2.3. Literary

Throughout its 5000 years of history, political terminologies used in China are usually rich in culture, and in the dialogue of political activities, they have often been used to quote classical and poetic quotations. [3] These Chinese classics are

the best reflection of the long history and profoundness of Chinese culture. Their highly summarized phrases can express the intentions of the Party and the government to the people in a way that is not lacking in Chinese characteristics, but is also close to the people and easy to understand, while at the same time contributing greatly to the promotion of China's excellent traditional culture [9].

3. Translation Methods

3.1. Cultural Dimension

1) ST: “既不能刻舟求剑、封闭僵化，也不能照抄照搬、食洋不化”

TT: We should never act blindly without assessing how conditions have evolved or allow ourselves to become ossified or closed off, nor should we mechanically imitate others or indiscriminately absorb foreign ideas.

There are four four-letter words and allusions in this sentence, which will cause great confusion to the target language readers if using the literal translation method [10]. Due to the different expression habits of SL readers and TL readers, the translator did not choose to keep the format of the four-letter word, but comply with TL readers. In this way, the translation would be easier to understand for TL readers, also in Chinese, there are many sentences without subjects, the translator also add subjects to the TT.

“刻舟求剑” is one of the idioms in Chinese, general speaking, if the ST are of other types, it is necessary to further explain the original meaning of these idioms, which can promote Chinese cultural. But considering that this text is a political report, the translator chose free translation.

2) ST: “中国特色社会主义”

TT: Socialism with Chinese Characteristics.

When translating “中国特色社会主义”, the cultural dimension plays a crucial role. This term not only represents a political system but also encompasses rich Chinese cultural elements and specific historical backgrounds. Firstly, the translator retains the core concept of “Socialism,” ensuring the accuracy of the political ideology. Secondly, by adding the modifier “with Chinese Characteristics,” the translator cleverly incorporates China's cultural features and historical backgrounds, allowing English readers to perceive the uniqueness and Chinese characteristics of this political system. This translation approach not only respects the cultural connotations of the original text but also enhances English readers' understanding and identification with China's political system.

Specifically, this cultural dimension transformation is reflected in the accurate translation of “Chinese Characteristics.” In English, the word “Characteristics” accurately conveys the meaning of “特色”, while “Chinese” clearly indicates that the source of these characteristics is China. This translation method preserves the cultural connotation of the original text while conforming to English expression habits, enabling English readers to accurately understand this political ideology.

3) ST: “中华民族共同体意识”

TT: The collective consciousness of the Chinese nation as a unified community.

In the translation process, the translator maintains the central idea of “Chinese nation,” accurately portraying the reference to this specific collective in the original text through the English term “Chinese nation.” Additionally, “集体意识” is rendered as “the collective consciousness of the Chinese nation as a unified community,” which not only encapsulates the notion of community but also underscores the elements of “unity” and “collective consciousness,” thereby preserving the cultural underpinnings of the original text’s depiction of the Chinese nation as a cohesive entity. By employing the phrase “collective consciousness,” the translator adeptly communicates the national sentiments embedded in the original text, highlighting the intimate bonds and shared identity among members of the Chinese nation. Furthermore, the expression “as a unified community” emphasizes the solidarity and unity of the Chinese nation, thereby reinforcing the national sentiments conveyed in the original text.

3.2. Communicative Dimension

1) ST: “扫黑除恶专项斗争”

TT: Combat Organized Crime and Root Out Local Criminal Gangs

When translating “扫黑除恶专项斗争”, the communicative dimension transformation is crucial for achieving effective information transmission and communication effectiveness. Firstly, the translator uses two juxtaposed verb phrases, “combat organized crime” and “root out local criminal gangs,” to clearly express the meaning of the original text. This translation approach not only conforms to English expression habits but also, through the use of strong verbs and noun phrases, enables English readers to feel the strength and determination of this political action [11].

Secondly, this translation approach also reflects the accurate conveyance and enhancement of the original text’s communicative intent. In Chinese, “扫黑除恶专项斗争” is a vocabulary with strong action colors and a sense of urgency, emphasizing the government’s determination and actions to combat crime and maintain social stability. In the English translation, the translator similarly retains this action color and sense of urgency, using the juxtaposition of the verbs “combat” and “root out,” as well as the clear referral of the noun phrases “organized crime” and “local criminal gangs,” to enable English readers to clearly understand the goals and significance of this political action and feel the government’s determination and actions.

2) ST: “反腐倡廉”

TT: Combating Corruption and Upholding Integrity

This term aims to convey the government’s determination and actions to combat corruption and uphold integrity. First, the translator uses two parallel verb phrases, “combating corruption” and “upholding integrity,” to clearly express the meaning of the original text. This translation approach not only conforms to English expression habits but also, through the use of strong verbs and noun phrases, enables English readers to feel the strength and determination of this political ac-

tion [12].

Furthermore, this translation approach also reflects the accurate conveyance of the original text's communicative intent. In Chinese, “反腐倡廉” is a vocabulary with strong action colors, emphasizing the government's anti-corruption actions and integrity building. In the English translation, the translator similarly retains this action color, using the juxtaposition of the verbs “combating” and “upholding” to enable English readers to clearly understand the goals and significance of this political action.

3.3. Linguistic Dimension

1) ST: “放管服”

TT: Streamline Administration and Delegate Power, Improve Regulation, and Upgrade Services

In translating “放管服”, the linguistic dimension transformation manifests prominently in both vocabulary selection and structural layout. The translator employs three parallel verb phrases: “streamlining administration and delegating powers,” “improving regulation,” and “enhancing services,” to faithfully convey the three core components of the original text. This technique not only adheres to English linguistic norms but also, by leveraging precise vocabulary and a well-structured format, facilitates a swift understanding among English readers of the specific details and objectives of this governmental reform measure.

Moreover, this translation strategy exemplifies an innovative and refined restructuring of the original text. In Chinese, “放管服” is a compact, holistic concept that succinctly encapsulates the core of government reform through the juxtaposition of three characters. In the English rendition, the translator mirrors this juxtaposition by translating the three elements into three parallel verb phrases, thereby allowing English readers to appreciate the precise content and aims of this governmental reform with greater clarity and ease.

2) ST: “一国两制”

TT: One Country, Two Systems

The translation of “一国两制” demonstrates high accuracy and fluency in the linguistic dimension. Firstly, the translator uses the juxtaposition structure of “One Country” and “Two Systems” to clearly express the core idea of “one country, two systems.” This structure is not only concise and clear but also conforms to English grammar rules and expression habits. Secondly, the translator's choice of vocabulary is also very accurate, with words like “Country” and “Systems” appropriately expressing the meaning of the original text.

Furthermore, this translation approach reflects respect and preservation for the original text's structure. In Chinese, “一国两制” is a holistic concept that emphasizes the combination of national unity and institutional diversity through the contrast between “一” and “两”. In the English translation, the translator similarly retains this contrast structure, using “One” and “Two” to enable English readers to quickly understand the essence of this political system.

4. Conclusion

Through the detailed analysis of the above examples of political terminology translation, we can see that the linguistic, cultural and communicative dimensions of ecological translation theory each play an important role in the translation process. In the linguistic dimension, accurate vocabulary selection and structural arrangement are the basis of translation quality; in the cultural dimension, respecting and passing on the cultural meaning of the original text is the key to successful translation; in the communicative dimension, clear information transmission and effective communication effect are the ultimate goals of translation. Therefore, when translating political terminology, translators need to consider these three dimensions comprehensively in order to achieve the best translation effect.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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