On Translation of Government Work Report from the Perspective of Functional Equivalence

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Abstract. Since implementing reform and opening up, China has obtained remarkable achievements in the areas of economy, politics, military, culture as well as international leverage. In this process, translation plays a vital role for it concerns about reputation and image of China. Translation of the government work report, which involves development status of economy, politics, education, people’s livelihood etc., contributes to help foreign readers to know China’s national situation and strengthen China’s international status. Nida’s functional equivalence theory is a reader-oriented theory that echoed the purpose of government work report translation. On the basis of the functional equivalence theory, this thesis tries to explore the translation of the government work report so as to provide reference for further study of the translation of similar texts.

Introduction

With the increasing international exchange and cooperation, China plays an increasingly important role in political and economic stage worldwide. Thus it inspires more and more countries to know more about China. In this process, translation plays its significant role, especially for the translation of government work report. The purpose of it is to help foreign readers to know our national situation, political condition and strategy in an effort to enjoy higher status and greater influence. Meanwhile, the study on government work report is also an impetus to smooth domestic economic construction.

Such politically tinged translation highlights the correctness. However, some of the translations of government work report are even not quite accepted by foreign readers. Although there is no one fixed theory that could be used as a criterion to judge all of the translations, relevant translation theories should be applied to this kind of translation. The theory of “functional equivalence” is one of the best choices for translators to apply in translating government work report. It is the principle that is reader-oriented and provides translators a brand new perspective to translate this kind of texts.

Functional Equivalence and Government Work Report

Eugene Nida, who is also a famous American linguist and translator, first proposed “dynamic equivalence” then he called it “functional equivalence”. Functional equivalence was defined by Nida as “in terms of the degree to which the receptors of the message in the receptor language respond to it in substantially the same manner as the receptor in the source language” (Nida, 1969). Nida’s theory breaks the stereotype that translations focus on verbal comparison between the original text and its translation and put more emphasis on readers’ reaction. The fellows Chinese scholars Jin (1987) and Ma (2003) has written the books, conducted further research and discussion of Nida’s functional equivalence and correlative questions.

The government work report is a formal written report given by the people’s governments at all levels and their subordinate departments on purpose of reporting their service conditions, main gains and experience, problems, plans, views and measures for the future (Guo, 2015). On the basis
of the Newmark’s text typology, the government work report is the informative text that brings information accurately.

China has implemented Chinese cultural “Going out” strategy for a long time. As one kind of publicity material, government work report plays a vital role, especially in establishing a good Chinese image in the international community. Therefore, the well-suited translation of government work report is beneficial to improve external image of China and promote communication in various fields (Wu and Zhao, 2015).

Translation Strategies of Government Work Report Based on Functional Equivalence

C-E translation of the government work report plays a vital role in presenting China’s global image. Selected from the government work report, the following section tries to solve the problems the author met in translation and explore translation strategies of the government work report from the perspective of the functional equivalence.

Add Explanation to Terms

From the perspective of vocabulary: a quantity of terms from different areas can be found in almost every government work report. They can be economic terms, political terms, cultural-loaded terms, technological terms or abbreviations in various aspects. These terms are always loaded with Chinese culture or political-oriented that the majority of foreigners will feel confused.

For example, “三证合一” in government work report of 2015 has been translated as “integrate the business license, the certificate of organization codes, and the certificate of taxation registration into one certificate” rather than “integrate three certificates”.

Here “三证” refers to the business license, the certificate of organization codes, and the certificate of taxation registration. This version of translation helps foreign readers know what it means in detail and avoid misinterpretation like “integrate three certificates”. Therefore, translators can add explanations to such kinds of terms in accordance with the theory of functional equivalence.

Those popular and well-known terms, such as “三个代表” (Three Represents) and “一带一路” (B&R, “the Belt and Road”, “the Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st-Century Maritime Silk Road”), could be translated without further explanation. However, the political policy expressions possess their special meanings, without proper explanations foreigners could not know what the exact meaning of “four stabilities” or “five-four-three” is about. Therefore, with the guidance of functional equivalence, this strategy used in government work report translation is necessary and appropriate.

Turn Two Synonyms into One

One of the typical features of the government work report is using two verbs together that have the same or similar meanings as it seeks to strengthen the expressive effects and tone. These two verbs always belong to synonyms. Such as “保障和改善”, “调整和优化”. One of the features of government work report is conciseness, therefore based on the theory of functional equivalence, it is better for translators to turn two synonyms into one.

Example 1

四是切实保障和改善民生, 促进社会公平正义。
Translation 1: Fourth, we ensured and improved people's well-being and upheld social fairness and justice.
Translation 2: Fourth, we are committed to improve people’s well-being and make great contribution to social fairness and justice.

Example 2

创新是经济结构调整和优化的原动力。
Translation 1: Innovation is the motive force for adjusting and upgrading the economic structure.
Translation 2: Innovation is the driver for optimizing the economic structure.
The first translations in two examples above are the official translation and the second translations are translated by interpreters. Synonyms “调整” and “优化” share the similar meaning and purpose. Similarly, the words with four Chinese characters such as “互利共赢” could be translated as win-win or mutually beneficial rather than translated as mutual benefit and win-win. Translation of such kind of text should be concise based on the text features of government work report. What’s more, from the perspective of the receptors, one word could convey the same information as two synonyms. Therefore, it is better for translators to cut down one of the synonyms as it looks to follow the principle that make emphasis on shorter than longer English text.

**Change Abstract into Concrete**

Language differences take effect on some words, especially those abstract Chinese words. This section mainly falls into concretization of those abstract words. Concretization here refers to translate abstract words into concrete words and contribute to comprehension of the targeted readers. The following examples will present concretization in more detail.

Example 1
Source text: “十二五”时期,我们要把科技工作摆在更加突出的位置,深化科技体制改革,从根本上解决科技与经济脱节的问题。
Target text: During the 12th Five-Year Plan period, we will give greater priority to R&D, deepen reform of science and technology institutions so that we can bring technological progress in line with economic growth.

This Chinese word “的问题” could not be translated into English because it refers to the economic growth and technological progress in accordance with the whole context. If it were translated into “problem” or “cause”, it would break the translation principle that “shorter in English than longer”. Although the word-for-word translation maintains the features of Chinese, the concrete words and interpretation makes the target readers understand them better.

Example 2
Source text: 这场国际金融危机与中国发展方式转变、经济结构调整的关键时期不期而遇,新新的挑战与既有矛盾相互交织,加大了我们解决问题的难度。
Target text: The financial turmoil has come at a time when China is striving to upgrade its growth model and restructure its economy. That has made it still harder for China to address challenges it faces at home.

Chinese abstract words should be concrete when translated into English. Translators should add their own understanding to the translation texts. It would be insignificant and bring burden to receptors if translators translate it by literal translation. According to the theory of functional equivalence, it is better to translate those abstract words, such as “的问题,难度,宗旨,理念”, more concrete in order to make foreign readers feel more natural.

**Convert Parataxis to Hypotaxis**

Parataxis and hypotaxis belongs to linguistic expression. English highlights hypotaxis while Chinese highlights parataxis. Therefore, formal cohesion is the key point in English sentence and semantic coherence is the crucial point in Chinese sentence. Nida have pointed out that the key of translation is to clearly understand the source language. Translators translate discourse rather than language itself. Here we pay more attention to the sentence structure and logic. Examples are as follow,

Example 1
Source text: 城镇化率由39.1%提高到51.3%,实现了城乡结构的历史性变化。
Target text: The urbanization rate rose from 39.1% to 51.3%, bringing a historic change in China’s urban-rural structure.

Example 2
Source text: 我国经济下行压力还在加大,发展中深层次矛盾凸显,今年面临的困难可能比去年还要大。
Target text: With downward pressure on China’s economy building and deep-seated problems in development surfacing, the difficulties we are to encounter in the year ahead may be even more formidable than those of last year.

From the examples above, the logic relations are hidden in the Chinese sentences but in English they have to be presented by prepositions and conjunctions in the English sentences. The words, with, and V–ing are the best choice to be used in English sentences since it would be much more natural for receptors. Therefore, on the basis of the theory of functional equivalence, it cannot be too much for us to value these expressions when we translate government work reports.

Conclusion

China has been playing an increasingly vital role in international political and economic prosperity. The government work report, which is one of the major materials for people worldwide to know more about China, has drawn more and more attention. Hence, its translation should be natural and would be examined by foreign readers. Nida’s theory of functional equivalence, which has been prevalent in China for decades, provides us new discipline and perspective to translate government work report. Only from this point of view that focuses on the receptors, could we translate it better.

References


