

Research on Strategies in Translating Metaphors in the 2024 Chinese Government Work Report

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Abstract: Metaphors are widely used in political discourse, which arouses great attention in academic study. The report on the government work, as a paradigm in political discourse, shows a distinctive feature of the times and text by using metaphors to construct a thinking framework for political reality. This paper aims to explore the application and translation strategies of metaphors in the English translation of the report of Chinese government work in 2024. By contrastingly analyzing the Chinese text and its English version, this paper reveals the corresponding translation methods of metaphors in political discourse to enhance the communication effect. In the translation process of metaphor, the translator not only experiences a profound shift from one cultural background to another but also finishes a complex cognitive journey. Literal translation can keep the original cultural elements but may cause confusion or misunderstanding while free translation can convey the meaning briefly and clearly but may lack the original cultural element, weakening the emotional strength of the original metaphors. Therefore, flexible translation methods should be adopted to deal with different metaphors to keep a balance between cultural differences and meaning conveying.

Keywords: Metaphor; Report on government work (2024); English translation strategy

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1. Introduction

According to cognitive linguists Lakoff and Johnson, metaphors are ubiquitous in everyday human life, not only in language but also in thought and action^[1]. Metaphor, as a widely used rhetorical device in political discourse, not only enriches the expressive power of language but also deepens the effect of conveying information. The government work report is also not an exception in using metaphors to enhance its communication effect. Being an important document for the Chinese government to show its policy direction and achievements to the outside world, the quality of the government report's English translation directly affects the international community's understanding and evaluation of China's policies. Therefore, it is of great significance to study the application and translation strategies of metaphors in English translation to advance the quality of translation and cross-cultural

communication effect.

2. Language features of the government work report

During the National People's Congress every year, the Premier of the State Council delivers a report on the government work, which not only reviews the government's work in the previous year but also provides a blueprint for the planning and implementation of the country's tasks in the following year^[3]. It is a salient text for the CPC in terms of discourse dissemination and political mobilization.

2.1. Policy-oriented and forward-looking

The government report focuses on the decision-making will and ideological path of national leaders, and can quickly and deeply map out the government's philosophy of governance and ideological system. As a highly authoritative and representative political document, the report represents the government's policy direction and governing philosophy, so it is momentous to understand the country's macro policies and development direction.

2.2. Formal and clear

As an official political discourse, the language of the report on government work is characterized by a high degree of standardization and authority. The language used in the report is usually meticulously selected and scrutinized to ensure the accuracy and formality of the information.

The language style of government reports is formal and is often used to express the government's position and decisions. The use of rhetorical devices aims to increase the expressive and persuasive power of the language, such as the use of metaphors, similes, synecdoche, and so on. These rhetorical devices not only enrich the textual level of the report but also deepen the effect of conveying information. For example, the use of metaphors to link abstract policy concepts with concrete, familiar things makes policy ideas easier to understand and accept.

3. Difficulties in metaphor translation

In the translation process of metaphor, the translator not only experiences a profound shift from one cultural background to another but also finishes a complex cognitive journey. The cognitive ability of human beings is limited by the development of the times and modern technology, and human beings cannot fully understand everything. However, metaphor, with its intuitive nature, constructs a kind of implicit imagery schema in cognitive thinking. It utilizes human's rich imagination to expand human cognitive boundaries, transforming the unknown into the known. As a significant discourse construction approach, metaphor is also a key strategy for conveying semantics. It is through its distinctive imagery and profound ideology that it refreshes human thinking paths and language expressions, greatly expands human cognitive space, enables humans to explore unknown conceptual domains, and reveals the basic rules and internal mechanisms of cognitive development. Metaphors are both cognitive and emotional, and this dual characteristic makes metaphors effective in promoting cognitive communication and emotional resonance, thus making the communication of attitudes and meanings more natural and attractive^[6].

Metaphors are deeply rooted in language, thought, and culture, if the translators ignore the differences between them, the communication effect will be influenced by the inappropriate translation.

3.1. Misunderstanding caused by literal translation

The translation of metaphors cannot accurately express the original meaning by literal translation sometimes. The translated expressions seem to be able to correspond in linguistic form, but due to the differences in different cultures, they do not accurately convey the meaning of the original metaphors. Such word-to-word translation of the metaphors may make it difficult for the target readers to arouse the same cognitive thinking path, bringing confusion or misunderstanding to the readers.

3.2. Emotionally inappropriate caused by the free translation

Considering the different cultures, metaphors can be just explained in plain language by free translation. However, in this way, the linguistic meaning can be conveyed, but the emotional and cultural elements may get lost in the explanation. Metaphors are used to influence the audience by evoking their thoughts and feelings by arousing their emotions. Metaphors further deepen the meaning by using rhetorical devices. If the translation only explains the meaning, it will weaken the impact of the original text and the author's intention.

4. Strategies used in translating metaphors

The influence of metaphors on translation at the level of cultural factors can be directly mapped into the choice of translation strategies and the choice of translation strategies is momentous. This part focuses on the choice of specific translation strategies in the 2024 government report. Some strategies are discussed to facilitate the dissemination of China's voice as follows.

4.1. Literal translation

In the context of the source language, linguistic and cultural diversity constitute two key dimensions of metaphor comprehension and expression: the contextual context and the cultural context. The strategy of literal translation, also known as word-for-word translation, refers to the fact that, as far as linguistic compatibility permits, translators need to accurately convey the main idea of the original text and endeavor to retain the rhetorical style and syntactic structure of the original text. According to the three principles of "Faithfulness, Expressiveness, and Elegance" in translation practice, "Faithfulness" means faithfulness to the original text, which is the first and foremost criterion of translation work. This criterion plays a pivotal role in all kinds of translation activities, especially in the translation of political texts, the accurate conveyance of metaphors is the norm that must be followed. The strategy of literal translation is widely used in the translation of political texts. Taking the translation of the 2024 government work report as an example, people can explore the advantages and characteristics of the literal translation strategy through several examples. These examples reveal how the literal translation strategy can effectively convey the intention and emotion of the original text while maintaining the style and structure of the original text, and then reproduce the appeal of the original text in the target text. The application of this strategy not only reflects respect for the original text but also shows the translator's professionalism and skills in cross-cultural communication.

Example 1:

Source text: ... 全面建设社会主义现代化国家迈出坚实步伐 .

Translation text: ...and made solid advances in building a modern socialist country in all respects.

In Example 1, the expression "迈出坚实步伐 (Take a solid step)" in the Chinese source text is a typical metaphorical usage. In conventional usage, the word "步伐 (step)" is usually associated with human walking,

while in the report, the subject of the action “迈出 (advance)” is metaphorically referred to as the Chinese government and its economic development, symbolizing a significant step forward to get closer to the goal set. This metaphorical expression conveys the message. In Chinese culture, “迈了一大步 (make great advances)” has a positive meaning and is an affirmation of progress. When translating this expression into English, the translator should pay attention to keeping the emotional connotation of the original text. In the translation, the translator chooses the English phrase “made...advances” to express this concept. “Advances” in English means “progress or an instance of progress in science, technology, human knowledge, and so on.” It also conveys the meaning of forward development and positive change, which has a positive connotation. Through this choice of translation, the translator conveys the literal meaning of the original text and retains the emotional tendency and cultural connotation of the original text.

Example 2:

Source text: 新征程新使命, 对政府工作提出了新的更高要求.

Translation text: The new mission on our new journey demands new and higher standards for what we do in the government.

In the process of translating, the English version of the report adopts a literal translation, i.e., “征程 (journey)” directly corresponds to “journey.” The meaning of “journey” in English is, especially in British English, a time spent traveling from one place to another, especially over a long distance. This definition matches the metaphorical meaning in the source language. Therefore, the translation chooses the strategy of direct translation in dealing with the metaphor, which conveys the core meaning and cultural characteristics of the source language. Through the comparative analysis of cross-cultural contexts, the translator’s translation strategy successfully retains the meaning of the original text and realizes the appropriate expression in the target language.

4.2. Free translation

Metaphor plays a pivotal role in facilitating the identification and understanding of potential content by message receivers, and have a decisive impact on the realization of communication goals^[2]. Given the fundamental differences between the English and Chinese languages at the cultural level, some metaphors may not be able to maintain both their figurative and semantic richness using literal translation in cross-language transmission. In the translation practice of the 2024 government work report, sometimes there is difficulty in finding equivalent metaphorical concepts in English, so the translator may need to adopt free translation such as abandoning the direct mapping of the image of the source language, and instead conveying the deeper metaphorical meanings of the metaphors by expressive conventions of the target language. This strategy is chosen to optimize the reading experience of target readers and to ensure that the translated text can achieve effective communication and meaning transfer in the cultural environment of the target language.

Example 3:

Source text: 重点领域改革仍有不少硬骨头要啃.

Translated text: There are still many challenging issues concerning reforms in key areas that need to be addressed.

In the above example, the phrase “硬骨头 (hard bone)” metaphorically features two implications: one symbolizes the quality of an unwavering individual, and the other represents extremely challenging tasks or obstacles. Although an initial translation might have favored “hard bone”, an in-depth contextual analysis revealed a deeper meaning of the phrase in the text, which refers to difficult problems that require a great deal of effort

to overcome. Based on this understanding, the translator chose “challenging issues”, to appositely convey the metaphorical meaning of the source language and to ensure that the target language readers can obtain accurate information in line with the source text.

Example 4:

Source text: 我们这样一个人口大国, 必须践行好大农业观, 大食物观, 始终把饭碗牢牢端在自己手上.

Translated text: As China has a large population, we must adopt an all-encompassing approach to agriculture and food and ensure that China’s food supply remains firmly in our own hands.

In example 4, the term “饭 碗 (bowl)” in the original text boasts strong figurative meaning. The literal translation of it as “bowl” may confuse exotic readers, because “饭碗 (bowl)” does not only refer to a physical bowl but is also a symbolic concept that is often used in the Chinese context to figuratively emphasize the importance of food security and self-sufficiency. The translator has adopted free translation and the selection of “food supply” conveys the underlying meaning of “饭碗 (bowl).” This approach helps to remove cultural barriers and enables the targeted reader to accurately understand the intent of the original text. The translation retains the core meaning of the source text and conforms to the expression habits of foreign readers.

4.3. Adaptation

Adaptation is mainly the pre-editing and post-editing of the original text by the translator to retain the main information of the source text and meet the reading habits and cultural and psychological expectations of the target language ^[4]. Adaptation implies the meaning of change. The translator intentionally changes the content and form of the original text to a certain extent to suit certain readers or for the purpose of translation ^[5]. When the cultural context of the translated language is inconsistent with that of the source language or when there are semantic differences, it is often necessary to use adaptation to achieve functional equivalence.

Example 5:

Source text: 进一步落实一揽子化债方案, 妥善化解存量债务风险, 严防新增债务风险.

Translated text: We will implement a package of measures to defuse risks caused by existing debts and guard against risks arising from new debts.

In example 5, the word “一揽子” in the source text is a typical metaphorical term and a culture-loaded word. In the Chinese context, “一揽子” is often used to refer to a series of interrelated and inseparable solutions or policies and emphasizes wholeness and comprehensiveness. If it is directly translated into “a basket of” or “a bundle of”, it may confuse the target readers because these expressions are not in line with theirs. “Package” is often used in English to describe a series of related items, services, or measures that are provided or handled as a whole, which matches the meaning of the Chinese word “一揽子.” Adaptation of it as “a package of” not only preserves the basic meaning of the original word but also conforms to target readers’ habits.

5. Conclusion

As China’s influence on the international stage has increased significantly, China has become the center of global attention. As an authoritative document on China’s development, the report on government work has caught extensive attention from the international community, as it is not only an essential window for the outside world to understand the policies of the Chinese government and its economic and social development but also an indispensable part of China’s foreign propaganda. The quality of the report’s translation directly affects the

international community's objective evaluation of China's development achievements, as well as its accurate understanding of China's national policies. Metaphor in political literature is a linguistic, social, and cultural phenomenon, which evolves with the development of society and reflects the reality of society. Metaphor translation is significantly representative, and the quality of metaphor translation can give a glimpse of the translation level of the whole text.

After an in-depth analysis of the English-translated version of the 2024 report on government work, it is concluded that the translator has adopted various translation strategies such as literal translation, free translation, and adaptation in metaphor translation, which are centered on the readers of the target language and aim at realizing the reading effect of the readers and have effectively conveyed the essence of the original text's metaphors. The analysis of this paper shows that the methods adopted by translators in translating metaphors in political literature are both flexible and effective, achieving the expected translation effect and providing valuable references and lessons for translation practice.

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