

# On the Translation Techniques of Chinese Political Essays from the Perspective of Nida's Functional Equivalence Theory

Taking the Report to the 18th National Congress of the CPC as Corpus

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**Abstract**—Nida's functional equivalence theory has a great influence among the translations circle throughout the world. The feasibility and instruction of his theory of English-Chinese or Chinese-English translation have been widely verified and confirmed. From the perspective of the theory, some techniques on the translation of the report to the 18th National Congress of the CPC are explored proving it is feasible and instructive. Thus, the theory has been adopted to improve the translation of political essays.

**Keywords**—functional equivalence; political essay; translation techniques

## I. INTRODUCTION

In writing style respect, the report to the 18th National Congress of the CPC (Hereinafter referred to as report) is a political essay full of terms and expressions with Chinese characteristics. It clarifies to international communities that the CPC brings forth both theoretical and practical innovations during a period of the completing the building of a moderately prosperous society in all respects and deepening reform and opening up in an all-around way. Moreover, it provides a good model of combination of China's English to Chinese political theory and social culture. Taking the report as corpus, this paper makes an exploration on the translation techniques of a political essay, from the perspective of Eugene A. Nida's functional equivalence theory. Several translation techniques in the report attempt to make the original text have conformity to the translated text in style, language, forms and meanings. The paper's intention is to elaborate on the feasibility and its instructive effects concerning political essay translations, benefiting communication and foreign publicity.

## II. NIDA'S FUNCTIONAL EQUIVALENCE THEORY

Nida's most notable contribution to translation theory is "dynamic equivalence" (1964), later altered to "functional equivalence" in the book of *From One Language to Another: Functional Equivalence in Bible Translating* (Nida & Taber, 1969). In Nida's view, "Translating consists in reproducing in

the receptor language the closest natural equivalent of the source language message, first in terms of meaning and secondly in terms of style." He also states: "The translation has been defined on the basis that the receptors of a translation should comprehend the translated text to such all extent that they all understand how the original receptors must have understood the original text."

Nida further perfected his theory in the 1990s suggesting both minimal and maximal definitions of functional equivalence. The former is that "The readers of a translated text should be able to comprehend it to the point that they all conceive of how the original readers of the text must have understood and appreciated it." The later indicates that "The readers of a translated text should be able to understand and appreciate it in essentially the same manner as the original readers did". Summing it up as the following main points:

- ◆ Translation is not only the equivalence of words' meaning, but also includes semantics, and styles. The message translation involves both the surface lexical information, and also deep cultural information (Guo Jianzhong, 2000: 67).
- ◆ He focuses on receptor's response, which is directed primarily toward equivalence of response rather than equivalence of form (Yang Sigui, 2007: 69).
- ◆ A dynamic equivalent translation must fit the receptor language and culture in order to make the translated message intelligible and natural to the target language receptors.

## III. THE TRANSLATION TECHNIQUES FOR THE REPORT

### A. Literal Translation

Literal translation is the translation of text from one language to another "word-for-word", rather than giving the sense of the original (Wikipedia). Additionally, "functional equivalent" does not disagree with the form equivalence, and

they are not contradicted against one another. Thus, the original meaning is preserved. Several political terms in the report have been translated into English by the way of literal translation, maintaining the political characteristic of the original and Chinese thinking modes. Also, the translated terms are in perfect harmony with semantic expressions, stylistic selection and the arrangement of message constituents from their original message. Therefore, the “functional equivalence” is achieved and easily understood by the receptors. Take these expressions as an example: “解放思想，改革开放，凝聚力量” (Hu jintao, 2012:1) are directly put into English like “to free up the mind, implement the policy of reform and opening up, pool our strength”. The original message and translated one are identical in both lexical forms and semantic expressions. More such examples are listed as follows:

流动人口和特殊人群 (Hu jintao, 2012:38)

the floating population and special groups

百花齐放、百家争鸣 (Hu jintao, 2012:31)

A hundred flowers bloom and a hundred schools of thought contend.

法律面前人人平等 (Hu jintao, 2012:28)

All are equal before the law.

综合国力 (Hu jintao, 2012:7)

China's overall national strength

国家文化软实力 (Hu jintao, 2012:31)

### B. Liberal Translation

Nida suggests the response of source language readers is an important element in terms of good translation. As long as the response of both source language readers and target language reader are relatively equivalent, the best translation can be implemented. In keeping the meaning and style of the source language functionally equivalent to those of the target language, he stresses on the functional equivalence of information instead of the direct formal equivalence.

In some cases, the liberal translations are more faithful to the original text than literal translations. Liberal translation is only tried when the readability of the translation is more valued than the preservation of the original grammatical structure. Being that the English audience know less real social or political situations about China, it is difficult for them to understand the political terms and expressions of Chinese characteristics. In this circumstances, meaning comes first in conveying original messages for the closest natural equivalent of the source language message. We have such a statement in the report in talking about the coexistence of international communities: “弱肉强食不是人类共存之道” (Hu jintao, 2012:47), whose English version is “The law of the jungle will not lead to the coexistence of human society.” “Law of the jungle”, disregard for the literal form of original Chinese message, fully implies the idea, “The weak will stand as an easy prey of the strong.” of the original text in a renewed

way (范勇, 2012:115). The translated message attempts an excellent similarity in meaning instead of form. The liberal translation is also applied in translating the following expressions:

创先争优 (Hu jintao, 2012:5)

to excel in their work

肝胆相照 (Hu jintao, 2012:30)

treating each other with sincerity

保障性住房 (Hu jintao, 2012:37)

low-income housing

血肉联系 (Hu jintao, 2012:49)

close ties

### C. Explanation

Semantic equivalence in translation seems to be difficult considering cultural differences, which often produces the semantic differences between source language and target language. For instance, one expression in source language has no a proper equivalent in target language. Thus, Nida states semantic equivalence may be achieved only if some appropriate changes in translation are made.

There have been many Chinese political abbreviations in the report, concise, vivid, and widely used by media. Nevertheless, there have no equivalents in target language of English. In regard to this, translation plus interpretative explanation is a good choice for the minimum functional equivalence in semantics (Yang Sigui, 2007:69). For instance, “三通” is one of the typical political abbreviations from the report. It may be literally or simply translated into English as “three links”. “Three links” is such one unacceptable term by the English audience that an interpretative explanation is added to the translation, “direct and two-way links of mail service, transport and trade”. In this way, the receptors would be able to understand immediately what the “three links” really mean. Another good example is in the translation of “三农” (Hu jintao, 2012:23). Since the term (“三农”) seems to be hard to be translated word-for-word, interpretative explanation is the key to the translation in this way: “issues relating to agriculture, rural areas and farmers”.

More examples are:

加强对“一府两院”的监督 (Hu jintao, 2012:26)

to oversight of people's governments, courts and procuratorates

推行党员旁听基层党委会议、党代会代表列席同级党委有关会议等做法 (Hu jintao, 2012:52)

To make arrangements for Party members to sit in on meetings of community-level Party committees and for delegates to Party congresses to attend relevant meetings of Party committees at the same levels, both in non-voting capacity

#### D. Combination

In Xiong Wenhua's opinion (Xiong Wenhua, 2007:14), combination is a translation technique integrating of two expressions into one avoiding the loss or addition to the meaning of original message. The method suggests that two paralleled nouns, verbs or phrases express same or similar things (Liu Yuanfu; Cao Jin, 2012:15). This may meet the basic requirement of the "functional equivalence", that is, meanings come first and then styles. This method is used many times in the translation of the report. We have such a statement "与人民心连心、同呼吸、共命运" (Hu jintao, 2012:51) in which "心连心" and "同呼吸" literally mean "heart to heart" and "breathing the same air" respectively. Actually they mean almost the same thing, "sharing the same lot". So the two things in the translation are combined into one and are translated into "be of one mind with the people". Similar statements are as follows:

一批名家大师 (Hu jintao, 2012:34)

large number of talented cultural figures

结束了近代以后中国内忧外患、积贫积弱的悲惨命运 (Hu jintao, 2012:56)

to bring an end to, once and for all, the misery of old China, a poor and weak country

永葆人民军队性质、本色、作风 (Hu jintao, 2012:43)

to preserve the nature and the character of the military as the people's army

推动中国特色社会主义理论体系进教材进课堂进头脑 (Hu jintao, 2012:32)

to incorporate the system of theories of socialism with Chinese characteristics into the curriculum and make it a way of thinking

#### E. Amplification

In Xiong Wenhua's opinion (2007:13), so-called "amplification" refers to extra words used in translated messages than in original messages, but without adding extra meaning to the translated text. Should the semantic equivalence be implemented successfully, "slight appropriate changes" would be made in order to reach the functional equivalence in semantics. The "changes" involve "words-adding", adding suggestive meanings, background information, intonation or explanatory notes to the translated messages. In doing so, the English audience should be able to understand and appreciate translated text essentially the same way as the original readers did. To make it more clear, we take this statement as an example: "发挥负责任大国作用, 共同应对全球性挑战" (Hu jintao, 2012:48), whose word-for-word translation is "to play its (China's) role as a major responsible country, and work jointly with other countries to meet global challenges." To make the translated message more complete and definite, "due" is added before "role". So we have got an amplified expression, "due roles", which lays an emphasis on the "roles" that China and Chinese government should take, and indicates that they have enough

encouragement and daring to do so. What a marvelous translation! In a word, the "amplification" method ensure the both complete grammatical structures and definite translated messages.

#### F. Division

The division requires that part of the original message (words, phrases or sentences) be separated in translating. Chinese language is a language featured with paratactic structures. The Chinese sentences seems to be "bamboo-like" structures, and made up of phrases or short sentences. Whereas English sentences appear to be "tree-like" structures (Zhang Huazhu, 2011:139). There are a large number of long and informative sentences in the report of Chinese version. Based on the grammatical and logical basis, the sentence structures have to be split and expanded in order to achieve the "functional equivalence". That is to say, should a simple Chinese sentence be split into two or more English sentences in translation, the translated message could fully convey the real meaning of the original text, regardless of the language structures of original text. That just supports what Nida holds "first in terms of meaning and secondly in terms of style". We have such a simple, but long Chinese statement in the report: "工业化基本实现, 信息化水平大幅提升, 城镇化质量明显提高, 农业现代化和社会主义新农村建设成效显著, 区域协调发展机制基本形成。" (Hu jintao, 2012:17). In translating, it is split into five short, individual English sentences in this way: "Industrialization should be basically accomplished. IT (Information Technology) application should be significantly expanded. The quality of urbanization should improve markedly. Notable progress should be made in modernizing agriculture and building new socialist rural areas. The basic mechanism for promoting balanced development between regions should be in place." We have another statement in the report: "综合国力大幅提升, 二〇一一年国内生产总值达到四十七点三万亿元。" (Hu jintao, 2012:3) This is a simple sentence, which is split into two individual English sentences: "China's overall national strength has grown considerably. The gross domestic product (GDP) reached 47.3 trillion yuan in 2011."

#### G. Transformation of Parts of Speech and Voices

Transformation of Parts of Speech and Voices are made to achieve the semantic equivalence functionally, without sticking to the forms. The parts of speech of nouns in original text may be transformed into verbs, pronouns, adjectives or adverbs in translated text; verbs into adjectives, nouns, prepositions or adverbs; adjectives into adverbs or phrases. For instance, "发展"(develop) is a verb in the original statement: "非公有制经济健康发展。" (Hu jintao, 2012:3), which is translated into "The non-public sector of the economy has registered sound growth." However, "growth"("发展") in the translated message have been transformed into a noun in order to be suited for English expression. The underlined word (行使) in the original statement ("支持和保证人民通过人民代表大会行使国家权力。") (Hu jintao, 2012:26) is a verb, however it is changed into a noun in the translated message:

“Support and ensure the exercise of state power by the people through people's congresses”.

Because of the differences in language features and thinking modalities, passive voices are less used in expressing Chinese texts. In Chinese text, implicatively passive words are used to indicate the passive voices. However more passive voices are used in expressing their English equivalents by the transformation of verb forms. This Chinese statement in the original text is expressed by active voice: “全民健身和竞技体育取得新成绩。” (Hu jintao, 2012:4), whose English equivalent whereas has become a passive one: “New progress has been made in public fitness programs and competitive sports.”

#### IV. CONCLUSION

Considering Nida's functional equivalence theory, and in the light of both target language and its culture, this paper makes an exploration on the feasibility of the theory on the translation of Chinese political essays and its instructive function on translation. The translators take the cultural differences and the readers' response into account, without sticking to the forms of original text, and attempt to seek for common points while reserving the differences. Therefore, the functional equivalence theory fully plays its roles in the translation of the original text. However, the theory suffers from its limitations, in other words, it lays excessive stress on language common ground and readability and seemingly neglect social or cultural aspects (Ni Wanhui; Yang Ying, 2004:36). The English version of “精神文明” is “socialist cultural and ethical progress”. Could it fully convey everything of the original message (“精神文明”) or is it under translation? Further studies should be made on the application of Nida's functional equivalence theory!

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