



An Analysis of the Translation of 2021 Chinese Government Work Report from Morphological and Syntactical Level

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Abstract. This paper studies the translation of 2021 Government Work Report of the Premier in a qualitative design, which analyzes both the lexical and the syntactical level of the translation, from the perspective of Nida's Functional Equivalence Theory. The author identifies and collects relevant lexical and syntactic strategies used in the Report, assembles lexical and syntactic patterns frequently appear in the Report, and analyzes the information conveyed by different expressions with different tones and attitudes. Also, the equivalent effects that Nida promotes are studied. In the aspect of lexical translation, the four-word patterns apply word-to-word translation strategy and necessary information is included in the translation of proper nouns; in the aspect of syntactical translation, the inanimate and non-subject sentences in Chinese apply subjects to both coordinate the grammar and achieve conciseness of translation, and the passive voice in Chinese can be converted to active voice in English to suit the habit of target audience. Based on the above findings, Chinese translators are suggested to be aware and fully understand the form and nature of the original and the target texts, the context in which it is placed, and the reading habits of the recipients.

Keywords: Functional Equivalence Theory, Government Work Report, translation strategy.

1 Introduction

Under globalization, cross-cultural communication is of great importance for international cooperation. Each year at the National People's Congress of the People's Republic of China, the Premier of the State Council would review the work of the government for the last year and put forward the next year's plan in Chinese Government Work Report, which is then an annual report summarizing political events and delivering directional strategies. Its translation version would also be provided to international audience, for which the translation is supposed to arouse an “equivalent” reaction on receptors. It is authoritative and informative whose translation is coherent and understandable in both form and content so as to make international readers understand the

policies and development of China. In this case, a well-formed translation theory is needed for instruction and analysis.

Functional Equivalence Theory refers as that translation needs to take “the same, or very similar” effect on audiences as the original text on the natives [1], to reproduce information of the source language, and to achieve not only formal correspondence, but also logical and meaningful consonance. The concept consists with the requisition of translation of Government Work Report. In the studies of translation strategies following the theory, the lexical and syntactic strategies are analyzed in many journal papers. Yet, the 2021 Government Work Report of the Premier Li Keqiang is not discussed in detail on the basis of the theory. Therefore, in this paper the effect of the translation will be analyzed to demonstrate the effect of the Functional Equivalence Theory in practice.

Functional Equivalent Theory is put forward by the famous linguist and translator Eugene Albert Nida. It originated from “formal equivalency” [8] and “dynamic equivalency” [9]. The theory is widely acknowledged and applied in translation. From the perspective of this theory, there are many journals analyzing the translation of novels and prose, yet political reports are not frequently discussed. Furthermore, researches on Government Work Report from the perspective of Functional Equivalence Theory are rare. There are discussions of specific lexical or syntactic characteristics of translation, such as in “A Study on C-E Translation Strategies of Expressions with Chinese Characteristics from the Perspective of the Context of Cultural Confidence: Based on the Report of the 19th National Congress of CPC” by Li Xue and Jing Liu. The paper mainly focuses on lexical analysis of the 2021 Government Work Report. Some other researches discuss “The Weak Intonation in the Translation” [16] of the 2014 and 2016 Government Work Report. Therefore, a systematic analysis of the latest Government Work Report is not yet studied.

Based on the analysis of qualities of Government Work Report in 2021 and its English version, the objectives of this research paper mainly focus on the following three aspects. First, it intends to compare the lexical and syntactic strategies used in the text. Second, it highlights Functional Equivalence Theory reflected in the text. Finally, it analyzes what effects these strategies could arouse, and how these strategies correspond to Nida's functional equivalence theory.

2 Methodology

The paper mainly follows qualitative design. Based on textual analysis of the original version of 2021 Government Work Report and its English version, the writer will compare the lexical and syntactic strategies used in the text, highlighting Functional Equivalence Theory reflected in the text, and then analyze what effects these strategies could arouse.

In detail, the writer will identify and collect relevant lexical and syntactic strategies used in the Report and assemble lexical and syntactic patterns frequently appear in the Report. The next step is to analyze how different expressions that convey different tones

and attitudes. Finally, the paper will reach the conclusion of how the translation follows the functional equivalence theory.

3 Lexical Strategies in 2021 Government Work Report Translation

This part will identify and collect lexical strategies used in the 2021 Government Work Report of Premier Li Keqiang, assemble these patterns which frequently appear in the report, then analyze how different expressions convey different tones and attitudes, and find out how the translation follows the functional equivalence theory.

3.1 The Translation of Four-Word Pattern

There are many four-character expressions in Chinese. In the Government Work Report, such pattern is frequently used in pursuit of formality and concision in language using. Four-word pattern limits the quantity of words, yet improves the quality of expressions. In English expressions, there is no such rule or habit. Therefore, the translation of this pattern could be difficult but significant, where the Functional Equivalence Theory is a vital standard to appraise the level of translation.

For some clear expressions, the most effective way is literal translation. In the 2021 Government Work Report of the premier, the following expressions are the examples translated in a literal and direct way:

坚持尽力而为、量力而行，加强普惠性、基础性、兜底性民生建设，
制定促进共同富裕行动纲要，让发展成果更多更公平惠及全体人民。

(Li, pp.13)

We will do everything within our capacity to improve the well-being of our people, and ensure that public services are inclusive, meet essential needs, and ensure basic living standards for people in difficulty. An action plan will be adopted to promote common prosperity to see that our people share more fully and fairly in the gains of development. (Li, pp.13)

There are five four-word expressions used in this sentence, most of which are put rather clearly and straight-forwardly. In this case, literal translation, which means to translate the direct meaning of the source language, suffices. “The big picture” means the situation as a whole, which is literally equal to “大局” in Chinese. “克”’s meaning here is to conquer or to “[fight]”, and “in close solidarity” here corresponds to “共” in Chinese, which means “hold together tightly”. “艰” here is processed as “adversity” by which means challenges and difficulties. “Unyielding spirit” here contains the meaning of persistent and steady efforts to overcome difficulties, which equivalents to the Chinese expressions “百折不挠”.

However, to strictly compare these translations with source language in the perspective of equivalence theory, not all words are transferred without discrepancy. For example, “尽责” here in Chinese emphasizes the adverb “尽”, which means “done one’s duty in everything possible”; yet in the translated version “shouldered their responsibilities”, the extent is not disclosed sufficiently by a single word “shoulder”, as it only mentions taking one’s responsibility rather than taking all the responsibilities. Also, “共克时艰” is not processed accordingly. The way the translator puts is far tediously longer than the original text, with a three-word expression “in close solidarity” corresponding to the singular adverb “共” in Chinese.

It is clear that during the translation, the adverbial meaning of Chinese expressions always hides behind the literal text. The translator should make additions to the translated version to reveal and unfold the subtle intention of the original speaker so as to clearly transfer his or her intention. In pragmatics, the speech act is categorized into locutionary acts, illocutionary acts and perlocutionary acts by J. L. Austin. Locutionary acts and illocutionary acts are “alternative descriptions of the utterance”, while perlocutionary acts refer to “the relation between the utterance and its causal effects on the addressee” [6]. As mentioned earlier in this paragraph, the process that the listeners transfer the utterance will decide the ultimate effects on the conversation; therefore, whether the interpreter understands what the core issue and purpose are in the original text and appropriately transfers it becomes the assessing criteria of translation.

Here in the expression of “尽力而为，量力而行”，the interpreter did a perfect translation, for “do everything” points out the extent of “尽”，and “within our capacity” contains the meaning of “量力” in Chinese. “民生建设” here is processed to “public services for people in the difficulty”，and we can notice that the translator adds meaning in this English version. The Chinese word “民生” does not necessarily have the meaning of “people with difficulty”. Actually, it refers to the economy and people’s life issues that range from national reformation such as the implement of employment-first strategy, expansion of educational capacity, and development of public health system etc., to individual well-being such as housing and pension for the elderly. “民生” never constrains itself into specific type of people, but it is doubtless that the concept is always related to or concerned more with people who are hard to earn their living. Considering the text is extracted from the Government Work Report of China, and the economic policies that relates to “民生” does have inclination to address to the “people in the difficulty”，the addition planted here reminds international audience of the priority of developing Chinese economy and consists with the policy of common prosperity. Thus, it is much more appropriate than solely formal equivalence without augmentation. Similarly, “全体人民” here in the report shall refer to all the Chinese people rather than people over the world, thus the translator puts it “our people” to avoid any misunderstanding. Also, “our” contains a sense of belonging, which softens the rigidity of official air and reciprocates with the use of “we” in other parts of the report.

However, in this paragraph not all expressions were done perfectly. “行动纲领” here does not merely mean an “action plan”，for plan in English means something that you intend to do or achieve, but “纲领” in Chinese has more indications than plan in English. It means not only having the intention, but also having a detailed and systematic

programme or principle to achieve the goal. In Chinese “纲” means outline, and can be combined with other adjectives to form a more concrete thing. For example “课纲” is syllabus that states exactly what students at a school or college should learn in a particular subject. It is a rather formal and serious character in Chinese, and “plan” here does not reveal the nature and the integrity of “纲”.

3.2 The Translation of Proper Nouns

Another type of four-word expressions are four-word proper nouns. These words are compacted from certain policies or relevant events, in order to impress the audience and reach the effect of better and wider propaganda. In this case, more detailed information and further explanation should be revealed in the process of translation to elaborate the expressions:

多渠道做好重点群体就业工作，支持大众创业万众创新带动就业。

(Li, pp.4)

Multiple channels were tapped to ensure employment for key groups, and startups and innovation were encouraged as a way to create jobs. (Li, pp.4)

把有效监管作为简政放权的必要保障，全面落实监管责任。 (Li, pp.19)

Effective regulation is necessary for our efforts to streamline administration and delegate power. (Li, pp.19)

In the first sentence, the pairs of four-character expression in Chinese is rhythmic in reading, yet literal translation cannot cover all the meaning. If we use literal translation to put “大众创业” into “public entrepreneurship”, we will find it obscure and therefore hard to understand. “大众创业万众创新” is a policy put forward by premier Li Keqiang on Summer Davos Forum, September 2014, to encourage the public to get involved in the trend of starting up businesses so as to motivate the economy. Therefore, in the official version, the word is interpreted as “startups”, which means “start doing something connected with a new business” and is more idiomatic and natural for English readers to comprehend the policy released by Chinese government. Compared with the translation of this word in 2020’s Government Work Report, the proper noun is more completely translated to “business startups”, as there is no context of “employment” as in the 2021’s report. Therefore, in the latter Report, the omission of “business” is reasonable and appropriate.

Similarly, in the second sentence, “简政放权” is a policy that advocates government to operate in a clearer procedure, which is aimed to reduce intervention in routine administration and to decentralize management power. The formal translation that

“streamline administration and delegate power” is concise and comprehensive and contains the core meaning of the policy. Supplementary details are indispensable in translation according to Nida's Functional Equivalence Theory, as foreign readers need relevant knowledge to grasp the significance of original contents, rather than several paired phrases without priority or meanings.

一是围绕市场主体的急需制定和实施宏观政策，稳住了经济基本盘。

(Li, pp.3)

We formulated and implemented macro policies to meet the urgent needs of market entities and kept the fundamentals of the economy stable. (Li, pp.3)

Here in this example, the proper noun is not a typical four-word pattern. “经济基本盘” in Chinese is a metaphorical term. On one hand, it refers to the economic foundation accumulated in the past, such as infrastructure and technological reserves. On the other hand, it reaches superstructure level, such as the mindset and behavior patterns of the citizens, as well as cohesion, national spirit, economic and social organization, which are all part of the “经济基本盘” that determine the future development of Chinese society.

“盘” here is a metaphor, and if the translator does not consider the actual reference of the term and just puts it as “economic tray” or “economic plate”, the English audience will be completely confused. As is explained earlier in this paragraph, “盘” here means the foundation of something, so the target text need to convey this signified meaning. Therefore, the formal version of the translation discards the metaphorical part and keeps the actual meaning, which makes the text more understandable to the readers.

4 Syntactic Strategies in 2021 Government Work Report Translation

This part will identify and collect syntactic strategies used in the 2021 Government Work Report of Premier Li Keqiang.

4.1 The Use of “We” in Inanimate Sentences

One of the differences between Chinese and English syntax is the importance of subject. It is a significant component in English sentences, and the subject-predicate relationship must be considered while forming a sentence as it is the core of the syntax. Therefore, the subject in English is indispensable. However, the function of the subject in Chinese is relatively weak; accordingly, the subject-predicate relationship is quite flexible. As long as the meaning of the sentence is clear and strong, the subject is dispensable. One can understand this principle by realizing that English is more concerned with morphological consistency, while Chinese cares more about semantic consistency. That explains why there are so many inanimate and omitted subjects in Chinese. In

political domain, these subjects are used for the purpose of stylistic formality and semantic seriousness. However, in English it is not often the case. Although there are many inanimate subjects in English language, the total omission of the subject will destroy the structure and function of the whole sentence. Therefore, the translator must figure out the method to transmit the sentence in the original text without forming a fragmented one. Here are some examples that delicately solve the problem:

要准确把握新发展阶段，深入贯彻新发展理念，加快构建新发展格局，
推动高质量发展，为全面建设社会主义现代化国家开好局起好步。
(Li, pp.9)

We should have an accurate understanding of this new stage of development, fully apply the new development philosophy, and accelerate our efforts to create a new development pattern to promote high-quality development. By doing so, we will set the stage for building a modern socialist country in all respects. (Li, pp.9)

Most subject missing sentences in the report is translated into English version with the subject “we”. In Chinese, “we” refers to “我们”, which is a collective subject of the speaker him or herself as well as people he or she is talking to. There is a sense of belonging contained in this Chinese word, and it is always being used in public speech for the purpose to advocate the audience, to comfort somebody, or to show the support to the listeners. In this example, although the Chinese text does not point out who is the subject, by deducing from the context, we can recognize that the agent of this sentence is the Chinese government who shall “understand” the development, “apply” new philosophy, “accelerate” their efforts, and “create” a new pattern. “We” here in the English version is a statement of identity and responsibility, and it fits the meaning in the source language, by which the Chinese central government indicates that it is the whole government members who made these efforts, not just one or two members in the team. Also, the address of “we” draws the distance of Chinese people closer to the government, as the subject implies that Chinese people and the Chinese government are a unity, and people are fully respected and it reciprocates the basic assurance that the Chinese people are the true masters of their country, their society and their own destiny.

Also, we can notice that the Chinese text is a long sentence, and the English version breaks the whole sentence into two, and separately entitles them with the “we” subject. It is another discrepancy between these two languages. Chinese sentence is always divided into shorter phrases and clauses, in which case the Chinese sentence can be rather long but strong. It has a loose structure, and the cause-and-effect relationship may not be prominent enough. On the other hand, in English, it is challenging to highlight logical relationships in a complex sentence as one English sentence only has one subject and the relation between subordinate clauses are complicated. In most cases, Chinese tends to be more concise and shorter than English. In this example, however, due to the formal nature of government documents and the use of parallel structure, it is difficult to take into account logic of the whole paragraph. Therefore, instead of insisting on using one complete sophisticated English sentence, the translator splits it into two, and

begins the second sentence with “by doing so” to directly address the cause-and-effect relationship of the discourse and achieves the syntactic and semantic equivalence.

4.2 The Translation of Passive Sentences

Inanimate or missing subjects are prevalent in Chinese sentences, and besides using “we” to supplement the agent in English version, the translator can also apply passive voice to achieve similar equivalence between native Chinese audience on the original text and English readers on the target text. One of the syntactic differences between Chinese and English is that the former has more active voice while the latter has more passive voice. Passive and active voices address a structural issue and the relationship between the actor and the action in the sentence. In the active voice the subject of the sentence does the action, while in the passive voice the subject does not do the action but suffers it. Choosing the voice of the sentence in some circumstances depends on what the speaker tends to emphasize. If the agent in the speech has already been mentioned before or not significant in the speech, the speaker will omit the agent and put what really matters to the beginning of the sentence to arouse sufficient attention of the audience. Here are some examples in the practice of the translation strategy in the Government Work Report:

决胜全面建成小康社会取得决定性成就，交出一份人民满意、世界瞩目、可以载入史册的答卷。（Li, pp.2）

Indeed, our achievements, which have won the approval of our people and global recognition, will be remembered in history. (Li, pp.2)

全年发展主要目标任务较好完成，我国改革开放和社会主义现代化建设又取得新的重大进展。（Li, pp.2）

Our development goals and tasks for the year were accomplished, and major headway has been made in China's reform, opening up, and socialist modernization drive. (Li, pp.2)

In this example, key points “决定性成就” and “全年发展主要目标任务” are given at the beginning of the sentence in the Chinese version, and these two subjects are not referred to animate subjects. Therefore, it leads the translator to consider reversing the voice used in the original text. There is a split of sentence in the translation of the first sentence, and the aim is to highlight the subject in a long complex sentence. We have already discussed this type of translation method in the earlier paragraphs, so the attention now pinpoints exactly the process of the voice issue. In the first sentence, the agent who “交出一份人民满意、世界瞩目、可以载入史册的答卷” is actually the Chinese central government in relation to the context. In the original text, as the subject is self-evident to the Chinese audience, the reporter omits the agent in order to make the sentence more formal and serious. The translator can transmit the text by adding a “we” at the beginning of the English sentence as he or she does in the examples we analyzed in the last part. Yet there is another way to do this, and that is to apply the passive voice.

It can be “the Chinese central government achieved a satisfying result”, or “the achievements of the Chinese central government will be remembered”, and clearly this former version does not highlight the key part of the sentence and is not consistent with the English language habit. In the second official version, the meaning and the form of the sentence comply with the English language principles, making English audience clear of information that the source text intends to convey.

The first half of the second example extracted from the report is another situation where the passive voice is applied. “全年发展主要目标任务较好完成” is already a passive sentence in Chinese. Therefore, the translator only needs to follow the linear translation method, which means that the translation is done in the order of the original text. It can accurately convey the message of the original without adjusting the language order and structure, and will not cause misunderstanding or ambiguity to the readers. The remaining part of the second example demonstrates another circumstance using the passive voice. It is neither the omission of the subject as “我国改革开放和社会主义现代化建设” is the subject in the sentence, nor that the source text uses passive voice, but the subject in this half is inanimate subject. In this case, to avoid inconsistency in the meaning or violation against English grammar, the translator chooses to reverse the active voice in the Chinese text, and processes the text into the English version “major headway has been made in China’s reform, opening up, and socialist modernization drive” to reach the syntactical and semantic equivalency.

5 Conclusion

The purpose of translation is to convey message and reach consensus; hence, to reach formal equivalence is far from enough. From the analyses of both lexical and syntactic levels of translation of 2021 Government Work Report, the equivalent effects that Nida promotes are studied. In the aspect of lexical translation, the four-word patterns apply word-to-word translation strategy, necessary information is included in the translation of proper nouns, and translation of expressions with Chinese characteristics are completed by enclosing relevant background details; in the aspect of syntactical translation, the inanimate and non-subject sentences in Chinese apply subjects to both coordinate the grammar and achieve conciseness of translation, and the passive sentences in Chinese can be converted to active voice in English to suit the habit of target audience. Therefore, Nida's Functional Equivalence Theory is sufficed in the translation of 2021 Government Work Report, and the experience of translating political document improves the level of practical translation activities. In the process of translation, the Functional Equivalence Theory is a vital device to assist translators to continue effective translation in diplomatic field and to demonstrate Chinese image.

This translation analytical practice is based on the Chinese and English texts of the 2021 Government Work Report, as well as the translation of news and journals. Through lexical and syntactic analysis, it is clear that translation requires not only continuous improvement of the understanding and transmitting of both Chinese and English, but also equipment of specific translation strategies such as augmentation, word transformation, and syntactical conversion, and so on. The translator shall be aware and

fully understand the form and nature of the original and the target texts, the context in which it is placed, and the reading habits of the recipients.

Also, the translator shall select appropriate and effective theories to guide the practice. In this translation practice, due to the special characteristics of news texts, the compilation of current affairs news does not pursue word-by-word correspondence, but takes the target language readers and target language culture as the basis, and attaches importance to the response of target language readers and the transmission of the meaning of the text. This has something in common with the functional equivalence theory proposed by Eugene Nida. So, translators can choose the functional equivalence theory as the theoretical reference and standard for translation practice. The theory of functional equivalence has important theoretical guidance for translation practice and analysis, and is conducive to the smooth implementation of the compilation and translation activities of current affairs news. Therefore, in the practice of such news translation, the theory of functional equivalence can be selected as the theoretical guidance for practice and the theoretical value of the theory of functional equivalence in such translation can be given full play.

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