

C-E translation strategies of political texts under manipulation theory: taking the *Report to the 20th National Congress of the CPC* as an example

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Abstract: With the development of China's economy and the continuous enhancement of its comprehensive national strength, countries around the world have developed a strong interest in China and its culture. Against this backdrop, the translation of political texts has increasingly become one of the methods for the international community to know China. Grounded in André Lefevere's Manipulation Theory, this paper examines the C-E translation of the *Report to the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China*, analyzing translation practices from three dimensions: ideology, poetics and patronage. By summarizing translation strategies including literal translation, free translation, amplification and division, this paper concludes that translators of political texts should give full play to their subjective initiative, adhere to the principle of safeguarding national interests, and convey the information and cultural connotations of the source text faithfully and accurately. On the basis of case analysis, this paper also discusses research limitations and proposes prospects for future studies, with a view to improving the international communication effect of political text translation.

Keywords: manipulation theory; political texts; *Report to the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China*; translation strategies

1 Introduction

Political text translation is a key component of China's international communication, bearing the responsibility of disseminating China's voice and shaping its national image.

1.1 Research purpose

Given the great significance of the *Report to the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China*, Chinese translators are duty-bound to accurately convey the spirit of this report. This paper aims to explore appropriate translation methods supported by relevant theoretical frameworks. As the guiding theory of this study, Manipulation Theory establishes a sound analytical framework for case analysis. The translation of political texts is highly complex: it involves not only linguistic transfer but also information transmission, power relations, and discourse manipulation. Offering a valuable analytical lens, Manipulation Theory helps identify manipulation-oriented strategies in political-text translation, including rhetorical devices such as metaphor, persuasive techniques, and emotional appeals [1]. Drawing on the three core components of Manipulation Theory, this paper firstly verifies the viability of Manipulation Theory for translation studies on political texts. Secondly, its application opens up new research perspectives for political-text translation research. Furthermore, the case material for this paper is drawn from an authoritative Chinese political document, namely the *Report*

to the 20th CPC National Congress, which covers China's political, economic cultural and other key fields.

1.2 Research significance

As a bridge and window for international audiences following China's development trend, the English translation of Chinese political texts has gained growing importance. Rising global attention toward China and Chinese culture makes political-text translation a vital medium for cross-national understanding [2].

As one of China's most pivotal official political documents, the *Report to the 20th CPC National Congress* contains extensive information on national governance, economy, culture and social development. Accurate translation of such political texts is therefore of particular significance, as it helps explicate the Chinese path, the Chinese system, and the practices of China's reform, opening-up and modernization drive. By examining the English translation of the Report, this study sheds light on the features and challenges of political document translation for target readers, and offers practical insights for the cross-cultural communication of political discourse. This paper also summarizes guiding principles applicable to political document translation through textual analysis of its Chinese-English versions.

1.3 Paper structure

This paper consists of five chapters. Chapter 1 introduces the research background, purpose and significance of the study. Chapter 2 presents the literature review, covering the basic concepts and features of political text translation, as well as relevant research progress at home and abroad. Chapter 3 elaborates the theoretical framework of André Lefevere's Manipulation Theory. Chapter 4 conducts a case analysis of the C-E translation of the *Report to the 20th CPC National Congress* from the three dimensions of Manipulation Theory, and summarizes corresponding translation strategies. Chapter 5 concludes the major findings, research limitations and future prospects of this study.

2 Literature review

2.1 Related studies on the translation of political texts

Lefevere's translation theory was introduced into China in the mid-nineties of the 20th century. Chinese scholars have examined its theoretical strengths and limitations and extended its application to diverse research fields to enrich its explanatory power. Hu Fangyi applies Lefevere's Manipulation Theory to political-text translation research and argues that translators must fully consider ideological manipulation over translation and maintain national cultural awareness while accommodating foreign readers' thinking patterns [3]. Jia Yi believes that the significance of political texts as a crucial conduit and lens for foreign observers concerned about China's development to understand the course of China's reform and development should not be exaggerated [4]. It is particularly imperative to elucidate the Chinese path, the Chinese system, and the practice of China's reform, opening up, and modernization while ensuring accurate translation of political texts. Guo Yingping believes that the accurate translation of political documents is of great significance, and its quality is related to the international image of a government or country [5]. With the rise of China's international status, English translation of political texts becomes more and more important. The essence of translation is actually a process of de-shelling and restructuring, and the "shell" of each language is different. Therefore, the translation of political documents requires awareness of Sino-English differences, faithfulness to the original text in content, and compliance with English expressive conventions in form [6]. Similar conclusions can also be found in research on current-affairs news translation from the perspective of Manipulation Theory, which highlights the constraints of contextual factors on news and political discourse translation [7].

2.2 Related studies on introduction to Manipulation Theory

The development of Manipulation Theory goes through three stages: the advent of the Cultural Turn, the gradual emergence of Manipulation Theory, and the formal formation of Manipulation Theory. Zhu Yan points out that many

translation theorists in international translation studies, such as James Holmes, Susan Bassnet and André Lefevere, have emphasized the cultural nature of translation from their respective perspectives since the 1970s [8]. According to Lefevere "translation does not take place in the vacuum of two languages, but in the context of two literary traditions [9]". Translators work in a particular culture at a particular time. Their understanding of themselves and their culture is one of many factors that influence their approach to translation. This represents a new perspective of translation studies, which shifts its focus from earlier linguistic comparison and value-oriented evaluation toward the interplay between the two cultures, contributing to the Cultural Turn of translation studies. It has established the foundation for the development of Manipulation Theory.

Hermans, founder of Manipulation Theory, points out in *The Manipulation of Literature: Studies in Literary Translation* that "all translation is a manipulation of the original text to some extent for some purpose" [10]. Later, Lefevere highlights in his book *Translation, Rewriting and the Manipulation of Literary Fame* that translation activities are carried out within a set of conditions and constraints [11]. The subsequent proposal of the three-elements model and the "rewriting" theory constitute a major breakthrough in translation research, marking the formal formation of Manipulation Theory.

2.3 Summary

Existing scholarship has confirmed the analytical value of Manipulation Theory in translation studies and explored the influence of ideology on political text translation. Nevertheless, existing research mostly focuses on the single dimension of ideology. Few studies have conducted comprehensive and systematic analyses of the English translation of the *Report to the 20th National Congress of the CPC* by covering all three fundamental constraints of Manipulation Theory. Many studies remain at the level of theoretical interpretation without sufficient deep-going case discussion on the latest political documents.

3 Theoretical framework

3.1 Introduction to Manipulation Theory

The Manipulation School holds that translation is a distinct political, cultural and literary activity in the target society. Lefevere, a core scholar of the Manipulation School, put forward that translation is a rewriting of an original work. It provides a new perspective for translation studies [12]. It requires that translators should pay attention to both internal and external factors of a text, like the content of the text, the cultural and social background of this text.

3.2 Three concepts of Manipulation Theory

According to the Manipulation Theory, there are three key concepts, which are ideology, poetics and patronage. Ideology usually refers to a system of ideas reflecting the interests and demands of a particular economic form, class or social group, including people's political, moral, philosophical, artistic and religious views [13]. Poetics is another important factor in Manipulation Theory that influences translation activity. Patronage is one of the two controlling factors of the literary system.

3.3 Summary

The three core constraints of ideology, poetics and patronage constitute the fundamental analytical dimension of this study. As demonstrated above, Lefevere's three-component model is particularly well-suited to the analysis of the translation of official Chinese political texts. This theoretical model breaks the boundary of pure linguistic-oriented translation research and offers multi-dimensional perspectives for observing external constraints upon political text translation.

4 Analysis of the Report based on Manipulation Theory

4.1 Introduction to the *Report to the 20th CPC National Congress*

The Report to the 20th CPC National Congress was delivered by President Xi Jinping. The congress is held every five years and is convened by the Central CPC Committee. The 20th session was held from October 16 to October 22, 2022 in Beijing.

The Report is made up of 15 parts, which can be divided into four sections according to the logical structure of the Report. The first section of the Report is about work of the past five years and the great changes of the new era in the past ten years, emphasizing that "this is a historic victory won by the united struggle of the Communist Party of China and the Chinese people"; The second part of the Report clarifies that in opening up a new realm in adapting the Marxism to the Chinese context and the needs of the times, the Party unites and leads the people to bravely carry out theoretical exploration and innovation, and continuously write a new chapter in this respect; The third part expounds the mission and tasks of the Communist Party of China in the new era and new journey, emphasizing that the central task of the Party is to "unite and lead the people of all ethnic groups in China to fully build a great modern socialist country, realize the second centenary goal, and comprehensively promote the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation with Chinese-style modernization", which contains the idea of unity and struggle. The 20th CPC National Congress draws wide attention both domestically and internationally. Domestically, Chinese people recognize that national prosperity, people's well-being and national rejuvenation are closely bound up with the CPC, whose undertakings will shape China's development in the years ahead. Internationally, as an influential major political party and a globally pivotal country, China attracts worldwide attention. To understand contemporary China, the international community needs to understand the CPC and the outcomes of the 20th CPC National Congress.

4.2 Case analysis of the Report

4.2.1 Manipulation of ideology in translation

According to Lefevere, ideology refers to the forms, rules, and beliefs that shape our behaviour. The Report is a special political text that covers all aspects of China's social development. Its content bears distinct Chinese features and is inevitably shaped by China-specific ideological contexts. Therefore, its translation cannot escape ideological influences [14].

Example 1

ST: 我们全面推进中国特色大国外交，推动构建人类命运共同体，坚定维护国际公平正义，倡导践行真正的多边主义。

TT: We have pursued major-country diplomacy with Chinese characteristics on all fronts. We have promoted the development of a human community with a shared future and stood firm in protecting international fairness and justice. We have advocated and practiced true multilateralism.

The given text is political in nature and performs the vocative function. It expresses a firm attitude and resolve regarding Chinese diplomacy through phrases such as "firmly defend", "defend and practice", and "oppose". The translator splits the original long paratactic sentence into several independent English sentences while retaining the original syntactic feature of parallel clauses so as to strengthen the tone. The translator employs repetition skill and adds personal pronoun "we" in every single sentence, conveying a collectivist ideology. Additionally, to maintain the stylistic features of the original text, the translator uses the direct translation strategy and keeps the noun phrases in translation.

Example 2

ST: 坚决反对“台独”分裂行径，坚决反对外部势力干涉，牢牢把握两岸关系主导权和主动权。

TT: We have resolutely opposed separatist activities aimed at "Taiwan independence" and foreign interference. We have thus maintained the initiative and the ability to steer in cross-Strait relations.

The original text aims to convey China's determination and attitude to the reader by repeatedly using the phrase "resolutely opposes". The repetition of "resolutely opposes" in source text highlights China's firm stance. In translation, combination and division techniques are adopted to stress the importance of the content. At the same time, the addition of the first-person "we" emphasizes China's sovereign stance.

4.2.2 Manipulation of poetics in translation

From the perspective of the manipulation theory, poetics comprises two components: literary devices and literary functions. As for the former one, it refers to subjects, themes, archetypes, backgrounds, and symbols, while the latter refers to the social roles of literature. The report features rich and sophisticated content, requiring a highly skilled translator with foreign language proficiency and literary literacy, which is called poetics by Lefevere. To be specific, the translation should convey the ideas of the original text while making it easier for the target language readers to understand and accept. To strike a balance between fidelity to the source text and fluency in the target text, the translator prefers to apply poetics so as to break through the dilemmas.

Example 3

ST: 坚持和发展马克思主义，必须同中华优秀传统文化相结合。

TT: To uphold and develop Marxism, we must integrate it with China's fine traditional culture.

Contemporary political texts have a "calling" function, and the original text can convey information to readers intuitively through "persistence and development". English translation restores the calling function of the original text, takes into account the idiom of the target language, and achieves a faithful translation of the original text. To make it easier for the target language readers to understand and accept, the translator uses infinitive phrase to emphasize the purpose. Besides, the modal verb "must" and the subject "we" are used in translation to maintain the strong will from the speaker.

Example 4

ST: 明确我国社会主要矛盾是人民日益增长的美好生活需要和不平衡不充分的发展之间的矛盾，并紧紧围绕这个社会主要矛盾推进各项工作，不断丰富和发展人类文明新形态。

TT: We have identified the principal contradiction facing Chinese society as that between unbalanced and inadequate development and the people's ever-growing needs for a better life, and we have made it clear that closing this gap should be the focus of all our initiatives. With these efforts, we have made constant progress in enriching and developing a new form of human advancement.

When translating political terms or slogans with Chinese characteristics, the translator must take receptor poetics of the target culture into account, which may require supplementing the background knowledge of the reader. The term "社会主要矛盾" is translated as "principal contradiction facing Chinese society". The translation adopts a symmetrical structure, reflecting the semantic progression of the original text through the use of three subject-predicate constructions. Besides, the pronoun "this gap" is added, which establishes a strong connection between the preceding and subsequent contexts. The detailed explanation of the translations fills the reader's cultural and cognitive gap and caters to the target poetics, enabling readers to identify shared cognitive ground and enhance communicative effectiveness.

Example 5

ST: 以海纳百川的宽阔胸襟借鉴吸收人类一切优秀文明成果，推动建设更加美好的世界。

TT: With an open mind, we should draw inspiration from all of human civilization's outstanding achievements and work to build an even better world.

Chinese phrase "海纳百川" is translated as "with an open mind". The rhetorical devices attract the attention of readers. The figurative expression in the Chinese source text highlights the richness of outstanding civilization achievements. The translator adopts the generalization strategy to simplify the expression for readers to read smoothly and easily. In accordance with the linguistic habits of the audience, the translation allows readers to gain a deeper understanding of the original meaning and political significance of the quotation. This in turn allows the translator to achieve a more effective publicity effect.

Example 6

ST: 我国发展进入战略机遇和风险挑战并存，不确定难预料因素增多的时期，各种“黑天鹅”，“灰犀牛”事件随时可能发生。我们必须增强忧患意识，坚持底线思维，做到居安思危。

TT: Our country has entered a period of development in which strategic opportunities, risks, and challenges are concurrent and uncertainties and unforeseen factors are rising. Various "black swan" and "gray rhino" events may occur at any time. We must therefore be more mindful of potential dangers, be prepared to deal with worst-case scenarios.

In this case, direct translation strategy is used properly. "黑天鹅" and "灰犀牛" are terms of bottom-line thinking with Chinese characteristics. "黑天鹅" generally refers to an unexpected, low-probability and high-risk event that is unpredictable and whose impact is sufficient to overturn all previous experience. "灰犀牛" is a metaphor for a potential crisis with a high probability and high impact, which has the potential for change or transformation and is predictable. People are already familiar with the use of "黑天鹅" and "灰犀牛". In translating Chinese current-affairs texts, metaphorical rhetoric and vivid language carry special semantics. Retaining these two metaphors preserves the political stylistic feature of the source text, conveys original ideas vividly and manifests the awareness of risks.

4.2.3 Manipulation of patronage in translation

The term "patrons" refers to the individuals or institutions that promote or prevent the reading, writing, or rewriting of literature. These may include religious groups, political parties, social classes, publishing houses or the media. The translation of the government work report falls under the category of political text translation, and is carried out by national government departments. As the initiator and direct patron of the *Report* translation, the government exercises its ideological, political and linguistic manipulation power in the translation of the *Report*.

Example 7

ST: 我们开展了史无前例的反腐败斗争，以“得罪千百人、不负十四亿”的使命担当祛疴治乱，不敢腐、不能腐、不想腐一体推进，“打虎”、“拍蝇”、“猎狐”多管齐下。

TT: We have waged a battle against corruption on a scale unprecedented in our history. Driven by a strong sense of mission, we have resolved to "offend a few thousand rather than fail 1.4 billion" and to clear our Party of all its ills. We have taken coordinated steps to see that officials do not have the audacity, opportunity, or desire to be corrupt, and we have used a combination of measures to "take out tigers", "swat flies", and "hunt down foxes", punishing corrupt officials of all types.

In the translation of political texts, repeated use of "we have" strengthens the tone and determination of the speaker. The translator's subjectivity is constrained by the manipulation of the initiator. In the original text, "打虎"、"拍蝇"、"猎狐" are metaphorical rhetoric with Chinese characteristics, which can vividly describe the image of greedy officials and express China's determination to fight corruption. In order to retain the special Chinese political style, these words are translated accordingly: "tiger" refers to corrupt officials at the top, "fly" refers to corrupt officials at the grassroots, and "fox" refers to corrupt officials who have fled abroad.

4.3 Summary

Through case analysis above, it can be concluded that ideology, poetics and patronage jointly constrain the C-E translation of the *Report to the 20th CPC National Congress*. Under such multi-faceted manipulation, translators adopt domestication and foreignization together with concrete techniques such as repetition, combination, division and amplification to rewrite the source text. Ideology determines translation's political stance, poetics shapes linguistic and rhetorical choices, while patronage sets overall political-communication requirements for translation output.

5 Conclusion

5.1 Major findings

Based on Manipulation Theory, this paper explores the application of translation strategies in the English translation of Chinese political texts. The main findings are as follows: Firstly, in translated texts without explicit individual patrons, patronage can be interpreted as the abstract national ideological force that governs translational norms. Secondly, although Manipulation Theory does not center on internal textual features, it can still serve as an analytical framework for translation studies. By adhering to the original text and considering three factors—ideology, poetics, and patronage—translators can employ domestication and foreignization along with techniques such as addition, word class transformation, explanatory translation to rewrite the original text. This ensures conformity with China's ideology and poetics while fulfilling historical and cultural communication requirements laid down by patrons for articulating China's voice.

Drawing from Manipulation Theory and studying English translation of *Report to the 20th National Congress of Communist Party of China*, translators should recognize that political text translation conceals profound ideological confrontations beneath its surface. It is impossible to fully accomplish external publicity translation without first engaging with ideological considerations before addressing other factors.

In light of this realization, this study highlights both the guiding role and applicability of Manipulation Theory in external publicity translation. Furthermore, Manipulation Theory also imposes new demands on translators who must continuously enhance their political sensitivity while maintaining close alignment with mainstream ideologies at all times. Additionally, translators should fully comprehend the poetic norms of the target language.

5.2 Limitations and suggestions

Through this study, the paper has found the difficulties in the translation of political texts, and puts forward corresponding solutions according to the research. However, due to its limited academic level and limited space, there are still deficiencies in the above content. In terms of theory, the comprehensive understanding of relevant theories needs to be strengthened. At present, only three factors of "ideology", "poetics" and "patronage" are analyzed, and other factors are not fully analyzed. It is hoped that future research can incorporate other influencing factors in the Manipulation Theory. In terms of translation case analysis, this paper has not fully integrate theory with translation practice. For future research, more specific translation techniques can be explored for handling ideological factors within the context of political-text translation.

Conflicts of interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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