A Study on Chinese-English Translation of the 2023 New Year Address of Chinese President Xi Jinping from the Perspective of Catford's Translation Shifts Theory

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Abstract: The New Year Address of 2023 delivered by Chinese president Xi Jinping can be an important and representative way for the international community to know about today's China. As a text containing many long complex sentences with political connotations, the New Year's address can be a challenge for translators. In this passage, a study on the Chinese-English translation of the New Year's address under the guidance of Translation Shifts Theory of Catford was made, so as to see how this theory was applied in this kind of text, as well as to provide ways for translators to make shifts on some certain compositions in the sentences when doing Chinese-English translation, deliver proper and faithful translation, and show the Chinese spirits to the world.

Keywords: translation shifts theory, Catford, Chinese-English translation, New Year's address

1. Introduction

With the stable and sound development in recent years, China has grown into one of the major countries in many aspects and attracted more attention from all over the world. In this context, more windows and ways are needed for the international community to know about today's China as well as the spirits of Chinese people, among which the English version of works and speeches of Chinese leaders takes up an irreplaceable place.

At the mean time, these works and speeches of abundant political connotations are always given with long and complex sentences, consisting of all kinds of sentence structures, compositions and adjectives, which makes translation of these texts more difficult than that of other types of passages. In the face of these challenges, it is inevitable to take shifts of some kinds of compositions in translation into consideration. The Translation Shifts Theory of Catford may give translators some guidance.

According to Catford, shifts in translating can be divided into different sorts including level shifts and category shifts. The latter also includes several kinds including structure shift, class shift, unit shift, intra-system shift and so on. Examples going to be discussed in this passage are about level shifts and class shift.

Patterns and structures are different for languages. There are also some elements that exist in one language, but not in the other. This leads to level shifts: "Level shifts occur when there is no equivalent language expression of English in the target language, in which a level of source language items (such as grammar) corresponds to different levels of target language items (such as words)."[1] For example, we cannot find counterparts for tense of English in Chinese. So as for Chinese-English translation, tense can be used to replace words expressing time in Chinese.

Class shifts, as one kind of category shifts, occur when the counterpart of a part in source language belongs to another different class. One of the reasons that class shifts are needed is the parts of speech of words habitually used in Chinese and English are different. Shift from verb to noun (and vice versa) can be considered as a typical kind of class shift. Additionally, there may be no equivalence of some Chinese adjectives in English, which needs to be translated into other composition in the sentence, where class shift also happens.

2. An Analysis of shifts on the English translation of the 2023 New Year's address

According to Catford, the prerequisite of understanding and applying the Translation Shifts Theory is to acknowledge equivalence. This is because shifting can be considered as a process to break the equivalence. Equivalence also exist between English and Chinese. For example:

Source Text: 我在北京向大家致以美好的新年祝福！

Target Text: From Beijing, I extend my best Near Year wishes to all of you.

In the 2 sentences, all the compositions in the source text have their own counterparts in the target language. They are

of the same meanings, compositions and functions. No change was made in translating.

But we can't expect all the sentences are the same to these two. In the most time shifts are made.

2.1 Level Shifts

According to Catford, there are four levels in language: phonology, graphology, grammar and lexis. Shifts discussed in this passage take place between grammar and lexis. "In English,verbs can change their forms with different tenses, aspects and voices. While in Chinese, meaning can not be reflected through the grammatical inflection of words."[2] In Chinese, some extra words are used to show states of done, do or doing, which can be expressed by tenses in English. For example:

Source Text: 冰雪健儿<u>驰骋</u>赛场，<u>取得了</u>骄人的成绩。

Target Text: Chinese winter sports athletes <u>gave</u> their all and <u>achieved</u> extraordinary results.

In Chinese, the meanings of "取得" and "取得了" are different: tense is shown in the latter rather than the former. Words like "的" "了" tell that something has been done, which has no counterpart in English from the lexis level. In this example, "取得了" is translated as "achieved", the past tense of the verb "achieve", so that readers can know this is an event already happened. On the contrary, the Chinese verb "驰骋" does not show an apparent tense. It can only be translated into "gave" when the translator knows that the Winter Olympics in Beijing has already been held. Or, it will be confusing.

Source Text: 这一年<u>发生的</u>地震、洪水、干旱、山火等自然灾害和一些安全事故，让人揪心、令人难过。

Target Text: In the course of 2022, we <u>encountered</u> various natural disasters including earthquakes, floods, droughts and wildfires, and expreienced some workplace accidents.

This also shows that "发生的" is translated into "encountered", indicating that such natural disasters have already happened.

Similarly, some Chinese words also indicates the progressive tense. Such as:

Source Text: 各自由贸易试验区、海南自由贸易港<u>蓬勃兴起</u>

Target Text: Various pilot free trade zones and the Hainan Free Trade Port <u>are booming</u>

In Chinese, the verb "兴起" itself indicates that something is happening (often good things, translated as prosper, flourish, boom, etc). In the target text, "蓬勃兴起" is translated as "are booming", so as to show the state of doing.

Additionally, there are some other words indicating the progressive tense, such as "正在" "方" "适逢" "恰逢". The meanings of these words can be shown directly through tense, instead of translation.

Some words also indicate future tense:

Source text: 英雄的事迹<u>永远</u>铭记在我们心中

Target text: Those heroic deeds <u>will be forever</u> etched in our memories.

This example is slightly different from the others mentioned before: We can find two functions of Chinese word "永远". The first function is of the meaning level. It means "forever" (also translated as this in the target text). The other is of tense level. In the target text, the translator use future tense, which is judged from the word "永远". In Chinese, it means "lasting from now on and for a long time with no end". So not only does word have its own counterpart in English, it also carries the indication of future tense.

These examples are of level shifts. The meanings of "done" "doing" and "will do" are carried bu different compositions, and are shifted from lexis level in Chinese to grammar level in English.

2.2 Class Shifts (a Kind of Category Shifts)

According to Catford, class shifts are defined as "that grouping of members of a given unit which is defined by operation in the structure of the unit next above". When a part of one class in the source text is translated into another class in target text, class shifts happen. Here are two kinds of class shifts.

2.2.1 Shifts from Adjective to Prepositional Phrase

Some adjectives in Chinese have no direct counterpart in English, and have to be shifted into other classes in the English sentences. In most cases they are translated as an extra prepositional phrase, so as to be attached after the noun that they describe in the source text. Interestingly, for some adverbs which describe verb or the whole sentence and are difficult to translate from English to Chinese, sometimes translators also give an extra independent sentence. For example:

Source Text: Astonishingly, a crowd of several thousands turned out to hear him.

Target Text: 几千人都来听他讲话，这让人十分震惊。/令人震惊的是，几千人都来听他讲话。

These two strategies are quite similar:

adjective	describing noun	translated as independent phrases
adverb	describing verb or the whole sentence	translated as independent sentences

Back to shifts from adjectives to prepositional phrase itself, here are some examples in the New Year address:

Source Text: 我国继续保持<u>世界</u>第二大经济体的地位，经济稳健发展。

Target Text: The Chinese economy has remained the second largest <u>in the world</u> and enjoyed sound development.

In the source text, "世界(的)" is used as an adjective of "经济体" for the limitation of range. It is shifted into the prepositional phrase "in the world" as adverbial place in the target text.

But in English we actually have an adjective "global", which has the same meaning to the Chinese one. If it is used, the target sense group may become "the global second largest economy", where class shift doesn't happen.

Another example:

Source Text: 我们巩固脱贫攻坚成果

Target Text: We have consolidated our gains in poverty elimination.

Since there is no an "related to poverty elimination" adjective, "脱贫攻坚（的）" in the source text is translated as prepositional phrase "in poverty elimination".

2.2.2 Shifts from Verb to Noun

Shifts of part of speech of words often happen in translation between Chinese and English, since the words used habitually in these 2 languages are different. Dynamic vocabulary is preferred in Chinese, while abstract static vocabulary are used more in English. Thus, a verb-to-noun transition often appears in Chinese-English translation. Examples in the 2023 New Year address are as followed.

Source Text: 我国继续保持世界第二大经济体的地位，经济稳健<u>发展</u>。

Target Text: The Chinese economy has remained the second largest in the world and enjoyed sound <u>development</u>.

Source Text: 一代又一代人<u>接续奋斗</u>创造了今天的中国。

Target Text: With the <u>persistent efforts</u> of one generation after another, we have taken Chine to where it is today.

These two sentences are similar. Take the first one. As for "发展", which is both noun and verb in Chinese, Chinese tend to think that <u>we are developing</u>, which means that we are <u>taking the action of developing</u>. The position of the subject, human, is stressed. But that of English is different, where the abstract noun, development, tends to be separated from human as independent part. Thus, class shifts happen. And that is the same for "奋斗" and "efforts".

3. Conclusion

From what has been analyzed above, the conclusion that translation shifts of all kinds happen in the process of translating of the New Year address, which mainly attributes to the language with Chinese characteristics in the address, as well as difference between English and Chinese languages. At the same time, though not all kinds of shifts from Catford are listed here, it is possible to find that shifts happen in all time and of all forms, among which those related to lexical level (adjective to prepositional phrase, verb to noun, lexis to grammar) take up an important place. This may remind translators of paying special attention to lexis when translating. Knowing relations of vocabularies and ways to make shifts among them helps translators deliver better works, as well as demonstrate a better China to the world.

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