

Translation of Words with Chinese Characteristics in the Government White Paper from the Perspective of Cognitive Translatology

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Abstract—Cognitive Translatology has been advancing rapidly in translation research, as an increasing number of concepts and theories in cognitive linguistics are applied to translation studies. It offers a relatively objective approach to analyze and compare translation cases and helps to reflect translators' subjectivity and creativity. Guided by Cognitive Translatology, the translator selects some of the examples in the white paper *Responding to Climate Change: China's Policies and Actions* and discusses the difficulties during the translation process based on specificity, scope, perspective, prominence (four dimensions of construal). During the translation process, translators should take into full consideration the multiple layers of connotations encompassed by these terms, including political, historical, economic, and social aspects. It is important to pay attention to preserving cultural characteristics of the source text in order to accurately convey information.

Keywords—cognitive translatology, government white paper, words with Chinese characteristics, cognitive construal

I. INTRODUCTION

Climate change is a common challenge and threat for the future of mankind. China, the biggest developing country in the world, has taken proactive attitudes and made arduous efforts in response to this issue. On Oct 27, 2021, China released a white paper titled "Responding to Climate Change: China's Policies and Actions", in which it fully demonstrated new responses, actions and progress in mitigating climate change.

The Government white paper is one of the main channels for the Chinese Government to spread its policies, share some experience and promote communication and cooperation with other countries. Therefore, the translation of the white paper text should transmit the message of the original text faithfully as much as possible, as well as making the English version conform to the habits of the target readers and realize the communicative effects between countries.

The general objective of this study is to explore translation methods in white papers through case analysis on the English translation of a text on climate change from the perspective of Cognitive Translatology. On the basis of Cognitive Translatology, the research of the cognitive construal and effective translation methods of such texts will provide a reference for future translation of government texts. It holds theoretical and practical significance to some extent.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

In "The name and nature of translation studies," Holmes standardized the disciplinary name of translation studies and constructed the disciplinary framework for translation

research. He proposed the "Process-oriented descriptive translation studies," which focuses primarily on the cognitive activities of translators during the translation process [1].

A. Foreign Studies on Cognitive Translatology

Lakoff focused the research of cognitive translation studies on the method of metaphor, which brought about many cognitive translation studies based on the aspect of metaphor [2]. Barsalou contributed to the incorporation of frame cognition into cognitive translation studies through his discussion on frames, fields, and contrasts from the perspective of systematic and lexical organization [3]. In 1997, Fauconnier, in "Mapping in Thought and Language," introduced the concept of mapping between language and thought. This book provided another avenue for research in cognitive translation studies by introducing the method of mapping proposed in this theory [4]. Martin proposed two major research paradigms in cognitive translation studies: Computational Translatology based on the computational cognitive perspective, and Cognitive Translatology based on the situational cognitive perspective [5, 6]

B. Domestic Studies on Cognitive Translatology

According to Lu and Wang, the theoretical foundations of early-stage research mainly originate from translation psychology (or cognitive psychology) and cognitive linguistics [7]. Lin, focusing on the relevance theory of cognitive linguistics and integrating translation practice, proposed the theory of relevance translation [8]. Duan studied the theoretical models of cognitive linguistics and proposed that research on translation cognition should focus on translation cognitive patterns and translator translation abilities [9]. Miao and Liu, from a macro perspective, reviewed and summarized the theories and methods involved in previous empirical studies in translation research. They also explored the development status of such research and identified trends for future development in empirical translation studies [10].

III. COGNITIVE TRANSLATOLOGY

With the emergence of cognitive linguistics, scholars have progressively adopted cognitive approaches in the field of translation studies, leading to the development of a new discipline known as cognitive translatology. Within cognitive translatology, the concept of construal and its various dimensions provide a more specific framework for understanding the cognitive aspects of translation. This framework allows for the establishment of a clear link between construal and the process of translation.

Langacker described that there are mainly five dimensions of construal—specificity, scope, background, perspective and prominence [11]. Wang proposed that translation is a cognitive activity, which is based on the multiple interactions of the cognitive subject with the reality experience as background [12]. Different construal methods generate different meanings, and these different meanings leads to different modes of expression.

The translator should have a comprehensive understanding of the multiple meanings conveyed in the source text, and accurately translate it into the target language, ensuring that the translation effectively captures the real world and the cognitive realm that the author intends to describe. This thesis aims to study the English versions of government white paper at four dimensions of construal, which requires translator to choose different ways of observing scenes and explaining experiences, and then they will make different linguistic expressions.

IV. SAMPLE ANALYSIS IN THE WHITE PAPER *RESPONDING TO CLIMATE CHANGE: CHINA'S POLICIES AND ACTIONS*

A white paper is an official document released by the government to reveal the proposals for future legislation or clarify its position in some controversial issues. Different translation methods are to be applied according to the different emphasis on informative or expressive functions in the source language to achieve the best translation effect.

As a publicity text, the white paper entails many culture-loaded terms and terminologies, posing great difficulties to the translators. The translator is responsible to accurately express or convey what these glossaries mean. According to cognitive translology, four dimensions of construal, specificity, scope, perspective and prominence should be considered.

A. Specificity

In cognitive translology, the concept of “specificity” proposed by linguist Ronald Langacker refers to the degree of detail or precision in linguistic expressions. It manifests people’s ability to conceive or portray an entity with different degrees of accuracy and precision [13]. It focuses on how specific or general the language is in transmitting information. Translator’s particular purposes can be fulfilled by adjusting the degree of specificity. Langacker argues that languages have different resources for indicating specificity. Words and expressions in Chinese may not have direct equivalents in English, so translators need to take into account the specificity patterns of both the source and target languages to ensure accurate and appropriate translations, such as elaborating by addition and in-text notes, or simplifying by omitting repeated words.

Example 1: 中国实施能源扶贫工程, 通过合理开发利用贫困地区能源资源, 有效提升了贫困地区自身“造血”能力, 为贫困地区经济发展增添新动能。

China has implemented a project to alleviate poverty through the rational development and utilization of energy resources in poor areas, effectively boosting their economic development capacity.

In Example 1, “造血能力” means the ability to activate

one’s development. In this example, it refers to the economic development capacity of poor areas. Cognitive translology emphasizes the importance of considering specific linguistic and cultural contexts when translating. In the case of translating “造血能力” as “economic development capacity,” the addition of “economic” means that the translator deems it necessary to incorporate it to convey a specific aspect related to economic growth and development, thus enhancing comprehension while maintaining accuracy and faithfulness to the original text. The term implies the ability of a region to generate continuous economic growth and prosperity through resource development, investment, and infrastructure improvements. Therefore, the translation aligns with the principles of specificity in cognitive translology. It aims to accurately convey the concept in a way that resonates with the target readers’ understanding and effectively reflects the intended meaning in the source language.

Example 2: 人类是一荣俱荣、一损俱损的命运共同体
Human beings share a common future.

In the given sentence, opposite adjectives “一荣俱荣” and “一损俱损” are used to express the same meaning that human beings share weal and woe with each other in the face of prosperity or disasters. If two similar expressions with related meanings can be combined into a single expression without loss of meaning or impact, it may be more cognitively economical to do so. By combining them into a single expression, the translator condenses the message and reduces cognitive load for the target audience. This process aligns with the cognitive principle of simplifying, where related information is grouped together for easier processing and comprehension. As a result, the translated version achieves cognitive effect by presenting the interconnectedness in a concise and unified manner.

B. Scope

Scope generally refers to cognitive domains in Langacker’s framework of cognitive linguistics.^[13] Any system of concepts or knowledge can be a domain, like time, space, social relations, etc. Once a cognitive unit becomes the reference or background for understanding a more specific cognitive unit, it is also called the cognitive domain. For one thing, translators’ cognitive schema, including their cultural background and personal experiences, will influence their understanding of the original text. Therefore, an expression can be construed into different versions due to translators’ different domains and personal experiences. For another thing, translators should also consider the cognitive domain of target readers.

Example 3: 作为负责任的国家, 中国积极推动共建公平合理、合作共赢的全球气候治理体系, 为应对气候变化贡献中国智慧中国力量。

As a responsible country, China is committed to building a global climate governance system that is fair, rational, cooperative and beneficial to all, and makes its due contribution to tackling climate change using its greatest strengths and most effective solutions.

This is an example of Chinese four-character structures of

political neologisms. The translator needs to be flexible in dealing with Chinese four-character structures since there's no counterpart of it in English. In Example 3, the cognitive process involves understanding and conveying the meaning of “中国智慧中国力量”. The translator must process this information and construct an English equivalent that conveys the same sense of responsibility, cooperation, and China's contribution to addressing climate change. If “中国智慧” is translated literally into “Chinese wisdom”, the translation may be abstract for target readers and is unable to activate their cognitive background. Instead, the translator changed “Chinese wisdom” into “most effective solutions” to indicate the solutions China contribute to tackling climate changes. Therefore, this is a good transformation which is closer to the reader's cultural background, and is in line with the reader's cognition and also avoids ambiguity. “力量” in the dictionary not only means the ability to do things that demand physical effort, but also means bravery in dealing with difficulties. Here is the abstract meaning of this word but it's not difficult for target readers to grasp the general meaning.

Example 4: 中国围绕打好污染防治攻坚战, 重点把蓝天保卫战、柴油货车治理、长江保护修复、渤海综合治理、城市黑臭水体治理、水源地保护、农业农村污染治理七场标志性重大战役作为突破口和“牛鼻子”。

China has invested a major effort in seven landmark campaigns to keep the skies blue, control pollution caused by diesel trucks, protect and restore the Yangtze River ecosystem, improve the water environment of the Bohai Sea region, improve black and fetid water bodies in cities, protect water sources, and control pollution in agriculture and rural areas.

In the context of cognitive translology, the translation of “牛鼻子” as “major effort” is based on the consideration of scope. It is a Chinese idiomatic expression that can be literally translated as “bull's nose”. However, in this context, the concept conveyed by “牛鼻子” is the idea of something or someone being the main driving force or key aspect in a particular context. By translating it as “major effort”, the translator conveys the idea that these seven campaigns are essential and central to China's efforts in pollution prevention and control. This not only preserves the original meaning but also realizes effective communication. In this case, the seven landmark campaigns represents the main focus of attention in China's pollution control efforts. These campaigns are the foreground elements that stand out and drive the overall objective. The term “牛鼻子” is more like a background or contextual element in this translation. It emphasizes the significance and role of these campaigns as the driving force behind the pollution control efforts. “Major effort” conveys the idea that these seven landmark campaigns are the key focus and driving force in China's efforts to combat pollution. It is a more commonly used English expression that effectively conveys the intended meaning to English-speaking readers, ensuring better comprehension and engagement with the translated text.

C. Perspective

Perspective means the angle people portray the situation. Different perspectives reflect different ways of

conceptualization, and there will be different forms of language expressions. The perspectives translators adopt may differ as they are distinct in their cultural background, cognitive ability, personal experience, and so on. Apart from that, the source language and target language adopt different linguistic rules, which may influence the selection of perspectives in describing the same scene.

Example 5: 需要同舟共济、团结合作。

The whole world needs to work together in solidarity and engage in cooperation.

The translator's perspective, or cognitive perspective, influences their choices in translation techniques such as vocabulary selection and structural adjustments. Different translators may have varying perspectives, leading to different linguistic expressions and reader perceptions. In Example 5, “同舟共济” means crossing a river in the same boat. It uses metaphor to express the meaning that countries should work together to overcome difficulties. While there may not be a direct equivalent in English, the translation considers cultural factors to ensure the target audience can understand the intended meaning. The expression “work together in solidarity” accords with Western cultural values of collaboration and unity. It reflects a specific cognitive perspective by emphasizing the collective effort, unity, and collaboration implied by the original phrase.

D. Prominence

Prominence is also called figure/ground alignment of a domain [14]. In figure-ground perception, our cognitive system organizes information into foreground (figure) and background (ground) based on salience or prominence. The figure represents the main focus of attention, while the ground serves as the supporting context. When people observe a certain scene, they can pay attention to the whole event/scene or a part of the whole. According to cognitive linguistics, the maximally prominent or focal point is called the primary figure, while the less prominent part is viewed as ground [15].

Example 6: 中国生态环境保护工作也取得历史性成就, 环境“颜值”普遍提升, 美丽中国建设迈出坚实步伐。

China has also achieved remarkable successes in eco-environmental protection, and the overall environment is becoming more beautiful. It has taken solid steps to build a beautiful China [16].

In Example 6, “颜值” is an Internet buzzword usually describing one's facial attractiveness. But here it refers to the aesthetic quality or attractiveness of the environment, conveying the message that the environment is becoming more beautiful. If translated literally into “the face score of the environment is improved”, target readers will have no idea of its meaning. According to prominence in cognitive translology, the translator should bring attention to this concept by emphasizing its significance in conveying the overall meaning effectively. One possible approach could be explicitly highlighting the aesthetic aspect of the environment while ensuring cultural appropriateness in the target language. By explicitly mentioning the aesthetic appeal, the translator emphasizes the concept of “颜值” and

its implications in the context of environmental protection and the construction of a beautiful China.

V. CONCLUSION

Translation involves not just transferring words from one language to another, but conveying meaning, intent, and cultural nuances. A competent translation should go beyond a mere linguistic conversion and achieve an exchange at the cognitive level, ensuring that the cognitive experience obtained by the target language reader from the translation is consistent with that of the source language reader from the original text.

This paper conducts study into the translation of expressions with Chinese characteristics on the basis of cognitive construal from four dimensions of construal.

Firstly, by understanding the concept of specificity, translators can make informed decisions when choosing words, expressions, or syntactic structures to accurately convey the level of detail and precision intended in the source language text. This helps maintain the overall meaning and effectiveness of the translation in relation to specificity considerations.

Secondly, scope is encyclopedic and also a cognitive basis for understanding a linguistic expression. When people want to construe a scene successfully, the scene must activate the relevant knowledge and conception in people's cognition.

Thirdly, change of perspective ensures that the translated text conveys the intended meaning accurately and effectively, facilitating communication between different linguistic and cultural communities. It helps bridge the cultural gap and ensures the translated text resonates with the target audience.

Lastly, it is common to structure the same semantic content with alternate choices of prominence, which will result in different semantic meanings.

Climate change, which is closely connected to world economic development, social progress and human survival, is becoming a hot and frontier topic in the international political and environmental fields today. The translator should recognize the cultural terms referred to in the source text, and take all foreign countries and their cultures into account during the translation process [17]. Therefore, English translation of China's policies on climate change is of great academic value.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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