

Original Paper

Translation Methods of Chinese Characteristic Vocabulary in the Report of the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China under the Distinctive Language Style of President Xi

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Abstract

The Report of the 20th National Congress is a programmatic document that gathers the wisdom of the whole Party and the country, reflects the will of the people, has a significant guiding role in the development of the Party and the country, and has a positive impact on the international community. President Xi Jinping has led the whole process of drafting the report, which gave the text some of his personal language style. In order to introduce to the international community the CPC Central Committee's thoughts on governance, the historic achievements of the new era in the past decade, and the great blueprint for the new journey to the international community, the translation should be able to comprehensively and accurately reflect the original intention of the report, maintain consistency in ideological content and language style with the original text, and be understood and accepted by the international community.

Keywords

President Xi's distinctive language style, Chinese characteristic vocabulary, English translation methods

1. Introduction

The report of the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, as a political declaration aimed at raising flags at the National Congress of the Communist Party of China, reaffirmed the important ideas, core concepts, and major judgments of the Party Central Committee in governing the country, proposed some new ideas, concepts, and judgments, and launched a series of new strategies and measures. How to translate these important ideas, core concepts, and major judgments? How to

convey President Xi's distinctive language style to English readers? Based on the translation practice of the report of the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, the author conducted a detailed analysis and summary of the English translation of the report in response to the above issues, in order to provide inspiration and reference for the translation of other party and government literature.

2. Method

2.1 Translation of Important Ideas, Core Concepts, and Major Judgments

The reports of previous party congresses will summarize past work experience and outline future development blueprints, naturally showing a historical continuity in ideas and content, specifically manifested in the continuation and development of important ideas and viewpoints, major judgments and measures, as well as some core concepts and important expressions.

The characteristic of the Party Congress report also puts forward corresponding requirements for the translation of the text. The translation team must determine and follow clear principles: the important ideas, core concepts, and major judgments mentioned in the report, will the existing translation methods continue to be used? Do you need to make necessary adjustments or modifications based on the new understanding and specific context? How can the newly proposed important ideas, core concepts, and major judgments be accurately and effectively translated, while also being easily understood and accepted by the international community and the general audience, in order to better shape China's image and spread its voice?

In response to this problem, I found that there are two principles in the reports of the 18th and 19th National Congresses. One is to maintain the historical consistency of the translation of major concepts and not change them easily, such as "Socialism with Chinese characteristics" and "scientific outlook on development". The second is to keep up with the times and abandon outdated, inaccurate, and easily misleading translation methods, such as "cadres", "masses", "formalism", "individualism", and "liberalism".

2.1.1 The Continuation of English Translation of Important Ideas, Core Concepts, and Major Essays

The general tone of "seeking progress while maintaining stability" and "the main contradiction in Chinese society (the contradiction between the growing needs of the people for a better life and imbalanced and insufficient development)" have been established in the English version of the 19th National Congress Report and have been widely accepted, used, and circulated. The English version of the 20th National Congress Report will continue to be used.

A comparative study of the reports of the 19th National Congress and the 20th National Congress shows that some statements are identical or extremely similar, such as: "holding high the great banner of Socialism with Chinese characteristics", "adhering to emancipating the mind, seeking truth from facts, advancing with the times, seeking truth and pragmatism", "there is no end to practice, and there is no end to theoretical innovation." This confirms that the theme of the party and government documents and the party's major policies, strategic ideas are in the same line. In this case, the relevant

translations should be consistent as much as possible to avoid significant differences, which is also a principle that should be followed in the translation of party and government literature, and can be said to be “upright” in translation.

2.1.2 New Translation of Important Ideas, Core Concepts, and Major Judgments

The “Four Comprehensive Strategic Layouts” have been translated in the English version of the 19th National Congress Report, with the first “comprehensive” being “building a moderately prosperous society in all respects”. The Fifth Plenary Session of the 19th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China proposed that after China achieves the first centenary goal of “building a moderately prosperous society in all respects” as scheduled in 2020, we should seize the opportunity to embark on a new journey of “building a socialist modernized country in all respects” and achieve the second centenary goal. As a result, the Chinese meaning of the first “comprehensive” in the “four comprehensive” strategic layout has undergone substantial changes, which is still referred to as the “four comprehensive” literally. Based on this, the English version of the 20th National Congress Report also retains the same abbreviation as the Chinese version, and necessary modifications are made to the relevant content when explaining in the footnotes.

“中华民族迎来了从站起来、富起来到强起来的伟大飞跃”。 This sentence appeared in the report of the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, translated as “The Chinese nation...has achieved a tremendous transformation: it has stood up, grown rich, and is becoming strong.” Therefore, the translation of “富起来” as “grow rich” is in line with the popular slogan “致富光荣” (To get rich is glorious) in the 1980s. Perhaps due to the negative meaning of the word “rich”, the English version of the 20th National Congress report has changed to “grow prosperous” to express the state of “getting rich”.

The above are two examples of flexible adjustment of the translation according to the specific situation. They show that: if the connotation of the Chinese language has changed, the translation must be modified timely and accordingly; If the translator has a deeper understanding of Chinese, or can find a more appropriate English expression, it is necessary to present it in the translation, rather than sticking to the existing translation method. This is also the rigorous attitude that the translation team of party and government documents must hold and another translation principle that should be followed, which can be described as “innovation” in translation.

2.1.3 Translation of New Important Ideas, Core Concepts and Major Judgments

The report of the Party’s 20th National Congress planned the future action program and goals and tasks, and put forward a lot of new ideas, new concepts and new conclusions. These emerging concepts are rich in meaning, very important and have wide influence, so they need to be treated with caution. How to accurately understand and properly express them tests the wisdom and ability of the translation team. The most striking new concept in the report is “Chinese path to modernization”. This new concept first appeared in President Xi’s speech at the celebration of the centennial of the founding of the CPC on

July 1, 2021. The original is “创造了中国式现代化新道路”, which is translated as “we have pioneered a new and uniquely Chinese path to modernization”.

In the “Mission and Tasks of the Communist Party of China in the New Era and New Journey” section of the report, President Xi spent one third of the length (nearly 1,000 words) elaborating the five characteristics and nine essential requirements of “Chinese-style modernization”. This is also his first detailed explanation of “Chinese modernization”. The translators studied the report carefully and repeatedly discussed with foreign language experts who polished the text. Finally, they settled on the English translation of “中国式现代化”—Chinese modernization. Depending on the context, the same concept can be expressed by using “a Chinese path to modernization”. This translation method has eliminated adjectives and adverb modifiers such as “unique, uniquely and distinctively”, thus distinguishing it from the common translation of the concept of “Chinese characteristics”. It shows that there is an essential difference between Chinese modernization and Western modernization, and expands the way for developing countries to pursue modernization.

Another new concept related to “Chinese modernization” is the “new form of human civilization”. In the centennial speech of the founding of the Communist Party of China, President Xi simultaneously mentioned “creating a new path of Chinese modernization” and “creating a new form of human civilization”. The translation “create a new model for human advancement” also used in the report of the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China.

Another impressive concept in the report is the “Big food concept”, which appears under the sub-heading of “Comprehensively promoting rural revitalization”. The related expression is: “树立大食物观, 发展设施农业, 构建多元化食物供给体系.” After searching relevant information, it is explained that the food needs of the people are more diversified, which requires us to change our concepts, establish a big agricultural concept, a big food concept, to cultivated land, grassland, forests, oceans, plants, animals and microorganisms for heat, protein and develop food resources in a comprehensive way.

In order to better meet the people’s needs for a better life, while ensuring grain supply, we will ensure the effective supply of meat, vegetables, fruits, aquatic products and other foods. Considering that the “Big food concept” follows the idea of “seed industry revitalization, agricultural science and technology, and ensuring that the rice bowl of the Chinese people is firmly in their hands” in the report. It can be understood that China should ensure diversified food supply while consolidating the foundation of food security, and transform from “eating enough” to “eating well” and “eating healthily”. Thus, it can be seen that this is an all-encompassing concept, which is more appropriate to translate as “an all-encompassing approach to food”.

2.2 Distinctive Expression of President Xi

As mentioned above, President Xi led the whole process of drafting the report, which gave the report some of his personal linguistic style. His speeches on various occasions also have such a prominent feature, that is, full of literature, and a sense of rhythm. He is good at quoting classics, and having a

friendly tone. Here are some examples.

(1) ST: 江山就是人民, 人民就是江山. 中国共产党领导人民打江山, 守江山, 守的是人民的心.

TT: This country is its people; the people are the country. As the Communist Party of China has led the people in fighting to establish and develop the People's Republic, it has really been fighting for their support.

This is a typical Chinese expression, through the repetition of the same word “江山”, semantic emphasis and progression. The first and second “江山” refer to the “country”: the country is its people, and the people are the country. In other words, the country is formed by the combination of the people, and the country and the people are one, which reflects the nature of the socialist country belonging to the people. The latter two “江山” refer to “political power”: during the revolutionary war, the Communist Party relied on the people to overthrow the old regime and establish a new regime of the People's Republic (seize/win state power); In the period of socialist construction, the Party must continue to rely on the people to consolidate and defend this hard-won people's power (“defend/maintain state power”). The Party has always represented the fundamental interests of the overwhelming majority of the people, and all its efforts are aimed at winning their support.

The key to translating these two sentences is to understand Chinese correctly, pay attention to the logic of the sentence, and pay attention to whether the same English word can be used repeatedly in the sentence under the premise of logic. Since the meaning of “江山” in Chinese is different, the translation should also choose different expressions. “打江山” and “守江山” can be translated as “seize/win state power” and “defend/maintain state power” respectively. It is pointed out here that “the People's republic” is established and guarded, with more clear semantics.

Quoting classics is a distinctive feature of President Xi's language style. In his speeches on various occasions at home and abroad, he is good at quoting classic sentences, poems, proverbs and common sayings to explain relevant concepts in a deep and superficial way, endowing allusions with fresh and contemporary value, and helping to spread traditional Chinese culture to the outside world. This style of language is also reflected in the report of the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China.

(2) ST: 中华优秀传统文化源远流长, 博大精深, 是中华文明的智慧结晶, 其中蕴含的天下为公、民为邦本、为政以德、革故鼎新、任人唯贤、天人合一、自强不息、厚德载物、讲信修睦、亲仁善邻等.

TT: Our traditional culture espouses many important principles and concepts, including pursuing common good for all; regarding the people as the foundation of the state; governing by virtue; discarding the outdated in favor of the new; selecting officials on the basis of merit; promoting harmony between humanity and nature; ceaselessly pursuing self-improvement; embracing the world with virtue; acting in good faith and being friendly to others; and fostering neighborliness.

Are these ten ideas translated into sentences or phrases? How to fit their translations into this long sentence properly and keep the structure balanced and the expression smooth? If all of them are

translated into sentences, the problem of how to balance the ten sentences will arise. In contrast, using gerunds is easier to understand.

(3) ST: 万物并育而不相害, 道并行而不相悖.

TT: An ancient Chinese philosopher observed that “all living things may grow side by side without harming one another, and different roads may run in parallel without interfering with one another.”

When talking about building a community with a shared future for mankind, President Xi quoted this famous saying from the Book of Rites to explain the way of seeking common ground while reserving differences between countries. The difficulty of translation firstly is how to deal with antithetical sentences with equal growth and balanced structure, and secondly the translation of “道”. In the context of Chinese culture, the meaning of the word “道” is very profound, which can be understood as an abstract Taoist philosophical concept Dao (the Way), or translated as a concrete “road” that people will step out when they walk more. The latter is chosen: all things and roads exist in nature and can be compared. The translation “roads” is easy for readers to understand and does not require additional information about Chinese culture.

(4)ST: 涵养富贵不能淫、贫贱不能移、威武不能屈的浩然正气.

TT: We will foster within our Party members an inner strength to never be corrupted by wealth or power, never deviate from principle even in poverty or humble positions, and never yield to the threat of force.

This sentence comes from *Mencius*. Translators should understand the meanings of “富贵”, “贫” “贱”, “威武”, “淫”, “移”, “屈”, and need to express “浩然正气” appropriately. Among them, “富” “贫” can be translated as wealth and poverty. “贵” translated as “power” seems to show power more than “high position”. “贱” translated as “humble position” seems to indicate a lower status than “low position”. For the translation of the word “淫”, it is more appropriate to be translated as “be corrupted by” according to the context.

(5) ST: 社会保障体系是人民生活的安全网和社会运行的稳定器.

TT: The social security system provides a safety net for people’s livelihoods and helps ensure social stability.

There are two metaphors in this sentence: “安全网” and “稳定器”, which are equivalent to “a safety net” and “stabilizer” respectively. The former is adopted and the latter abandoned: both the Chinese “安全网” and the English “a safety net” have their own figurative meanings in their respective languages, referring to the social security system, which can be understood by their respective audiences. The metaphor of “稳定器” translated as “ensure social stability” can also be clearly defined.

(6)ST: 增强全党全国各族人民的志气、骨气、底气, 不信邪、不怕鬼、不怕压.

TT: We must foster a firmer sense of purpose, fortitude, and self-belief in the whole Party and the Chinese people so that we cannot be swayed by fallacies, deterred by intimidation, or cowed by pressure.

In the translation, the first three phrases use the phrase “a firmer sense of+n.” to express the three kinds of “气”, while the last three phrases use the form of “cannot be+pp.+by” to express the three kinds of “不”, conveying the meaning of Chinese from the language and structure, as well as the rhythm of the translation.

3. Result

Above, the author provides examples from three aspects to analyze the characteristics and difficulties of English translation of the 20th National Congress report, as well as the principles of integrity and innovation. The examples in this article are all based on the analysis and interpretation of the translation by the author based on the report of the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China. They are all personal understandings, limited to their level of proficiency, and may have biases or inaccuracies. We kindly request criticism and correction from colleagues in the industry.

The translation of party and government literature is very important and quite difficult, and there are still many issues worth further exploration and research to help improve the overall quality of the translation, enhance the effectiveness of external dissemination, make the text understood and accepted by the international community, and contribute to the construction of China’s discourse system.

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