A Study on the Translation of the White Paper of the Chinese Government from the Perspective of the Functional Equivalence ——A Case Study of the Translation of *Fighting COVID-19: China in Action*

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Abstract: *As a type of official government document, government white papers are issued by the government to set out facts and take a position on a major issue or an international concern, possessing the characteristics of timeliness, publicity, objectivity, and authenticity. Using the theory of functional equivalence as the theoretical basis and the white paper named Fighting COVID-19: China in Action, which was published on June 7, 2020, as the research data, this paper analyzes some translation methods and strategies used in the translation of the white paper from the lexical and the syntactic level, providing some theoretical references to it.*

Keywords: *Government white paper, Functional equivalence theory, Translation, COVID-19*

1. Introduction

With the rapid development of society and modern science and technology, the political, economic, and cultural relations between China and other countries have become closer. Especially with China's rising international status, more and more people pay attention to the white papers issued by our government, so the translation of the white papers has become more important. "Government white papers are usually official documents issued by the government, bound in a white cover. The Chinese government white papers are released by the State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China, and they are translated into English, France, Spain, Germany, Japan, Russia, Arabic, and other languages. In these years, Xinhua news agency has simultaneously published the full text on the internet to reflect the timeliness and expand its influence [1]". The purposes of government white papers are to set out the government's proposals for future legislation or to indicate the position and attitude of the Chinese government on a certain issue. Thus, the translated version can not only open an important window for the rest of the world to understand and identify China, but also the quality of the translation is related to the effectiveness and strength of China's external publicity in certain aspects; therefore, it is necessary to achieve high-quality translation effect of the government white papers.

Since the founding of the People's Republic of China, COVID-19 is a major public health emergency with the fastest spreading speed, the widest range of infection, and the greatest difficulty in prevention and control. It is also a large-scale infectious disease pandemic that has occurred in the world in recent years. Since the outbreak of COVID-19, the Communist Party of China and the Chinese government have attached great importance to and promptly responded to it. Besides, guided by the concept of a community with a shared future for mankind, China has actively promoted international cooperation, demonstrated the "Chinese spirit" and "China's responsibility", and contributed "China's confidence," "China's wisdom" and "China's strength" to the global fight against the pandemic. On June 7, 2020, the State Council Information Office published the white paper *Fighting COVID-19: China in Action*. It is a true record of the arduous course of China's fight against the pandemic, with a total number of about 23, 000, including the preface, the body, and the conclusion. Government white paper, as an authoritative and rigorous political text, its English version has become a window for the world to understand China, shouldering the responsibility of introducing China. Thus, guaranteeing the quality of the translation of the white paper is gaining increasing importance. Using the theory of functional equivalence as the theoretical basis and the white paper named *Fighting COVID-19: China in Action* as the research data,

this paper analyzes some translation methods and strategies used in the translation of the white paper, providing some guidance for foreign publicity translation of government documents.

2. Translation Principles of the Political Documents

Political documents focus on current major events and social issues from a political point of view, with various forms and a wide range, and a certain political tendency. The research data this paper adopted belongs to the type of political documents. Political documents play an important role in foreign exchanges. China shows the world our achievements through the English translation of political documents. The English translation of political documents aims to convey accurate and detailed information to the outside world and make English readers be more aware of China's major policies and development. As an official form and an important channel for foreign publicity, the quality of the English translation of political documents is directly related to China's national image and determines the effect of China's cultural values and ideology output. Therefore, it is imperative to enrich and perfect the strategies of translation of political documents.

"The general requirements of the translation of political essays are: expressing the idea and content of the original text faithfully and accurately, maintaining the rhetorical devices of the original text, so that the translated text can play the same propaganda and agitation role as the original text [2]". Thus, the requirement of "faithfulness" is the primary and basic principle. The concrete and detailed descriptions can be further divided into three aspects: 1) make sure the content is accurate and the viewpoint is clear; 2) pay attention to the preciseness and attitude tendency of the expressions; 3) make sure the authority and identity of the terminology translation; 4) ensure logical rigor [3]. Taking these translation principles of the political documents as the starting point of the research, Nida's translation criterion of "functional equivalence" is found to be applicable and appropriable in directing the translation of the political documents. The introduction of functional equivalence will be presented in the next section.

3. Theoretical Basis: "Functional Equivalence"

Functional equivalence was firstly called dynamic equivalence in the 1960s in the course of translating the Bible. Corresponding to it, formal equivalence is another concept proposed by Nida. "Formal equivalence focuses attention on the message itself, in both form and content", while "dynamic equivalence aims at complete naturalness of expression" rather than containing the form of the source text [4]. He further pointed out that "A translation of dynamic equivalence aims at complete naturalness of expression, and tries to relate the receptor to modes of behavior relevant within the context of his own culture [5]". Given that the concept of "dynamic" was misunderstood as referring only to something which has impact; thus, Nida changed the previous name dynamic equivalence into functional equivalence, viewing translation as a form of communication and focusing more on what a translation does or performs. The ideal definition given by Nida could be stated as "the readers of a translated text should be able to understand and appreciate it in essentially the same manner as the original readers did." [6] Zhao expounded the core of functional equivalence, emphasizing that functional equivalence is not strictly word-for-word or sentence-for-sentence equivalence; however, the effect of the translation is highly valued [7].

In functional equivalence theory, four levels of equivalence exist, including lexical equivalence, syntactic equivalence, discoursal equivalence, and stylistic equivalence. Specifically, lexical equivalence refers to finding words in the target language that are not only equivalent in lexical meaning but also in cultural connotation with the original language to make readers have the same response as those in the original language. Syntactic equivalence refers to keeping the semantics unchanged, keeping consistent with the original sentential form under the language rules of the target language, and reconstructing the style and characteristics of the original language as much as possible. However, when there is a big difference between form and content, we should give up the equivalence of form appropriately and pay more attention to the equivalence of semantics and content. Discoursal equivalence is the ultimate goal of translation. Discoursal equivalence also includes the equivalence of context, situational context, and cultural context. In the analysis of discourse, not only the characteristics of language itself, but also its meaning and function in different contexts should be analyzed. Stylistic equivalence requires the translator to determine the style of the target language text according to that of the original language text to achieve stylistic equivalence. In addition, due to cultural differences in some styles, the cultural factors in the source language cannot be completely conveyed. What the translator can do is minimize the

cultural loss in the translation.

By introducing functional equivalence theory into the white paper translation practice, the problem of both formal equivalence and meaningful equivalence in white paper translation can be solved properly, making the translation clearer and enhancing the readability, objectivity, and practicability of the translation. In this paper, functional equivalence at the lexical and syntactic level will be analyzed with the white paper, *Fighting COVID-19: China in Action* as the research data, and some translation strategies will be presented to fulfill different equivalences.

4. Translation Strategies of the White Paper Based on Functional Equivalence

Under the guidance of Nida's functional equivalence theory, taking the white paper, *Fighting COVID-19: China in Action* as the research data, this paper analyzes the realization of the equivalences between the original texts and the translation version at the lexical and syntactic level by studying different translation strategies. At the lexical level, the translation skills, including literal and liberal translation, were analyzed. At the syntactic level, the application of conversion of active voice, division, and combination were analyzed.

4.1 Functional Equivalence at the Lexical Level

Lexical equivalence is the most basic and vital requirement to achieve functional equivalence in translation process. Word is the basic unit of one text, and it can express different meanings from the perspective of semantics, for example, the basic conceptual meaning, connotative meaning, social meaning, affective meaning, affective meaning and collocative meaning. In this sense, choosing an appropriate word is a challenging task, since it is also the first step for target readers to read and understand the original text. It is self-evident that fulfilling lexical equivalence is the cornerstone of ensuring the whole quality of the translation. Translation techniques such as literal translation and liberal translation will be analyzed at the lexical level, combining the functional equivalence.

4.1.1 Literal Translation

According to Feng, literal translation is a translation method that maintains both the content and the form of the original text [8]. Ye proposed that as a common technique utilized in the process of translation, literal translation means that both the content and the form of the source text will be kept in the target text [9]. Literal translation is often used to translate some terms and idioms, sometimes limited to simple sentences and technical terms translation. Literal translation is also applied to a sentence that contains a figure of speech [10]. The translation of political documents is stricter on the requirement of "faithfulness" to the original text because political documents involve the major policies and basic state policies of the party and the state. Thus, literal translation is widely used in the translation of the white papers.

Example 1:

Source Text: 2 月 2 日开始, 在中央指导组指导下, 武汉市部署实施确诊患者, 疑似患者, 发热患者, 确诊患者的密切接触者 "四类人员"分类集中管理, 按照应收尽收, 应治尽治, 应检尽检, 应隔尽隔 "四应"要求, 持续开展拉网排查, 集中收治, 清底排查三场攻坚战.

Target Text: February 2: Under the guidance of the Central Steering Group, Wuhan began to adopt measures to put four categories of people – confirmed cases, suspected cases, febrile patients who might be carriers, and close contacts – under classified management in designated facilities. The policy of ensuring that all those in need are tested, isolated, hospitalized or treated was implemented. Actions were taken to conduct mass screenings to identify people with infections, hospitalize them, and collect accurate data on case numbers.

As shown in Example 1, the professional and common expressions of four categories of people, including "确诊患者, 疑似患者, 发热患者, 确诊患者的密切接触者", were translated literally in the target text. The expressions of these four categories of people have different and specialized meanings from the medical point of view; thus, the translation of these terms should be unified and accurate to ensure the public cannot be misled. As for the requirements of managing these people, they are described as "应收尽收, 应治尽治, 应检尽检, 应隔尽隔". In the Target text, they are translated into four verbs: tested, isolated, hospitalized, and treated. However, the order of the English version is rearranged in chronological sequence. This is a reminder that literal translation advocates nearly the same linguistic form, while the order of the words or phrases can be rearranged under necessary conditions. Literal translation is not equal to rigid translation, allowing logic and flexibility. At the end of Example 1, the translation of three

actions: "拉网排查, 集中收治, 清底排查" is expressed as three verb phrases: "conduct mass screenings to identify people with infections, hospitalize them, and collect accurate data on case numbers", which are in keeping with the form and meaning of the target text.

Example 2:

Source Text: 针对这次疫情暴露出来的短板和不足, 抓紧补短板, 堵漏洞, 强弱项.

Target Text: Swift actions must be taken to address problems, plug loopholes, and reinforce weak links.

In Example 2, literal translation is employed to deal with the translation of the three parallel actions: "补短板, 堵漏洞, 强弱项". It should be noted that the application of literal translation is rather widely in translating a "metaphor". Here "堵漏洞" is translated into "plug loopholes", which is a typical case for translating a metaphor by using literal translation. The detailed explanation of "堵漏洞" is taking measures to make up for omissions in speech or action. In the target text, the detailed explanation is not adopted. On the contrary, the expression of "plug loopholes" is more vivid and concise without losing comprehension.

4.1.2 Liberal Translation

The definition of liberal translation varies with different scholars' understanding. Newmark believed that liberal translation is an interpretation that reappears the matters of the original text at the expense of the manners of the original text, or the content of the original text at the expense of the form of the original text, usually occurring as a longer interpretation than the original [11]. Jin proposed that liberal translation is not restricted by the words of the original text, and is not restricted by the sentence structure of the original text. It expresses the meaning of the original text in different ways from the original text. If the meaning of the original text will be blurred and indistinct, or even far from the original text when the literal translation is carried out. In that case, the translator should make adaptations according to the specific situation, adjust the grammatical structure, and carry out liberal translation to convey the true meaning of the original text.

Example 3:

Source Text: 强调要按照集中患者, 集中专家, 集中资源, 集中救治"四集中"原则, 将重症病例集中到综合力量强的定点医疗机构进行救治, 及时收治所有确诊病人.

Target Text: All confirmed patients, he said, must be hospitalized without delay, and severe cases must be sent to designated hospitals with sufficient medical resources so that they could be treated by medical experts.

Example 3 is a typical liberal translation, in which the relationship between the source text and the target text is not corresponding in form; however, the meaning of the source text is fully conveyed through the way of the expression of the target. At first, the principle of "四集中":集中患者, 集中专家, 集中资源, 集中救治 is not translated word by word, and its following sentence"将重症病例集中到综合力量强的定点医疗机构进行救治"is the explanation or the actual action of the principle, so these two parts are translated into a sentence "severe cases must be sent to designated hospitals with sufficient medical resources so that they could be treated by medical experts." Although the form between the source text and the target text is not equivalent, actually all the principles can be reflected in the target text, which is a kind of functional equivalence. Specifically, "severe cases" means "集中患者"; "be sent to designated hospitals" means "集中救治"; "sufficient medical resources" means "集中资源"; "treated by medical experts" means "集中专家". Additionally, the order of the sentence is also rearranged in the target text. The last sentence in the source text moves to the very beginning of the target text. On the surface, the source text and the target have nothing to do with equivalence; however, the information that they are conveying is totally equivalent. That is what Nida has always emphasized: functional equivalence weighs more than formal equivalence.

Example 4:

Source Text: 中华民族是懂得感恩, 投桃报李的民族, 中国始终在力所能及的范围内为国际社会抗击疫情提供支持.

Target Text: The Chinese nation never forgets the help and generosity it receives, and always reciprocates with the same goodwill. We are now doing all we can to support the international community in the fight against the coronavirus.

In Example 4, there is a Chinese idiom named "投桃报李", which is the key point of the translation in

the source text. Here, it is translated with the strategy of liberal translation. The literal meaning of "投桃报李"is giving a plum in return for a peach, meaning that returning present for present. Given the different cultural contexts, foreign people's understanding should be considered, and a clear and exact understanding should be the primary concern in an official political document; thus, it is translated into "reciprocates with the same goodwill", which is the explanation of the idiom.

4.2 Functional Equivalence at the Syntactic Level

Syntactic equivalence is of great importance to achieve the functional equivalence between English and Chinese. In the process of translating, the syntactic structure of a language must be analyzed carefully. The content of the sentences should be given more attention instead of the form of the sentences in order to achieve the syntactic equivalence, conveying the information of the source language to the greatest extent. At the syntactic level, the application of conversion of active voice, division, and combination were analyzed.

4.2.1 Conversion of Active Sentences to Passive Sentences

The translation skill conversion of active sentences was applied to convert the active voice in Chinese into the passive voice in English. Although both active and passive voices exist in Chinese and English, their intensity of applications is different. "Passive sentence is a common sentence pattern in English. Using passive sentences can highlight the object of action, reduce the subjective tone, and make the language more concise and clearer [12]". On the contrary, the passive voice is less commonly used than English because of the relatively flexible syntax in Chinese.

Example 5:

Source Text: 建立分级分层新闻发布制度. 坚持国家和地方相结合, 现场发布与网上发布相结合, 建立多层次多渠道多平台信息发布机制, 持续发布权威信息, 及时回应国内外关注的疫情形势, 疫情防控, 医疗救治, 科研攻关等热点问题.

Target Text: A tiered news release mechanism has been formed. At both national and local levels, a tiered information release mechanism has been formed to circulate authoritative information through various channels and platforms, both onsite and online, in order to address domestic and international concerns on virus control, medical treatment, and scientific research.

As shown in Example 5, there are no subjects in these two Chinese sentences, while the readers still can comprehend that the subjects of them are China or the Chinese government. However, this kind of sentence without a subject is unacceptable in English. In order to make the sentences more in line with the expression characteristics of English, passive voice is adopted in the target text. Besides, the application of passive voice gives more priority to the action itself that is reflected by verbs. In this context, China's efforts to fight against COVID-19 have been emphasized.

4.2.2 Division and Combination

Division and combination are also commonly used translation skills during the translation process. A long Chinese can consist of several coordinate clauses without any conjunctions, which is not acceptable in English; thus, several short clauses in Chinese are usually needed to be divided into several parts when doing translating. Besides, the translation skill of combination is also utilized in different cases. For instance, there is a logical relationship between two Chinese clauses. Under these circumstances, the combination is necessary. Some examples of division and combination are as followed.

Example 6:

Source Text: 中国呼吁国际社会更加团结起来, 摒弃偏见和傲慢, 抵制自私自利, "甩锅"推责, 反对污名化和疫情政治化, 让团结, 合作, 担当, 作为的精神引领全世界人民取得全球抗疫胜利.

Target Text: China calls on the international community to come together, abandon prejudice and arrogance, resist scapegoating and other such self-serving artifices, and stand against stigmatization and politicization of the virus. In doing so we will see that the spirit of solidarity, cooperation, responsibility, and dedication leads people around the world towards victory in our fight against the pandemic.

In Example 6, the source text is a long Chinese sentence, containing five main actions, including "呼吁", "摒弃", "抵制", "反对"and a causative verb "让". In the target text, this long Chinese source text is translated into two English sentences. The first four actions are put together in the same sentence, representing China's appeals. The last clause in the source text occurs as an independent sentence in the target text, which is seen as the result of these appeals. Dividing the long Chinese sentence into two short

English sentences can clearly convey the meaning of the source text, and the logical relationship among these clauses or sentences can be reflected better.

Example7:

Source Text: 3 月 29 日至 4 月 1 日，中共中央总书记，国家主席，中央军委主席习近平前往浙江，就统筹推进新冠肺炎疫情防控和经济社会发展工作进行调研.

Target Text: March 29 to April 1: Xi Jinping made an inspection tour to Zhejiang Province to review its COVID-19 control and economic and social development.

In Example 7, the source text is also a long Chinese sentence, containing two main actions, including "前往", and"调研". These two Chinese clauses can be translated into two sentences in English: one represents the departure to Zhejiang Province, and the other conveys the information of Xi's work or inspection. However, the target text makes a combination of these two actions, indicating that the purpose of going to Zhejiang is to make an inspection. Using an adverbial clause expresses the concrete contents of his inspection.

5. Conclusion

Using the theory of functional equivalence as the theoretical basis and the white paper named *Fighting COVID-19: China in Action*, which was published on June 7, 2020, as the research data, this paper analyzes some translation strategies used in the translation of the white paper at the lexical level and the syntactic level.

Firstly, at the lexical level, translation skills of literal and liberal translation were analyzed. In this part, some grammatical structures and expressions should be fully considered because of the differences between English and Chinese. Although literal translation and liberal translation are mutually exclusive and contradictory, each has its own advantages and disadvantages, but they are dialectically unified. Both can achieve functional equivalence in the process of translating.

Secondly, at the syntactic level, conversion of active sentences to passive sentences, division, and combination were studied. Specifically, in addition to the basic meaning of the sentence, the expression and reading habits of the target text should be fully considered to make the target text more readable and acceptable for the target audience. Sun proposed that in political documents, especially concerning about foreign affairs, the tone is usually firm and formal; thus, the translation of them should avoid being lengthy, obscure, and redundant [13].

In conclusion, the translation methods, and strategies of the translation of the white paper were analyzed under the guidance of the functional equivalence at the lexical and the syntactic level. The purpose of conveying information can be achieved, and the applicability of the functional equivalence can be proved to some extent in the translation of the white paper. As an important way for China to reach out to the world, the English translation of the white paper requires not only rich background knowledge, but also the understanding of the underlying information in the original text, and the flexible use of translation skills to convey the information of the source language to the readers more accurately, so that China can communicate with the world more unimpededly.

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