

Strategies of English Translation of Quadrisyllabic Words in Chinese Government Political Discourse

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Abstract

Taking Report on the Work of the Chinese Government as an example, this paper probes into the characteristics of quadrisyllabic words in Chinese government political discourse, the principles, and the feasible strategies of its English translation. The quadrisyllabic words in political discourse are neat, harmonious, concise, and clear, with distinctive linguistic and cultural characteristics. To maintain consistency, preciseness, and conciseness in its English translation, free translation should be given priority, literal translation should be supplemented, and free and literal translations should be combined with interpretation and annotation. The ultimate goal is to faithfully and creatively realize the transformation between the two languages, so that translation can convey feelings to foreign readers more smoothly.

Keywords

English translation of political discourse
Quadrisyllabic words

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1. Introduction

In recent years, China's economic strength has soared and its political status has also risen rapidly. With the proposal of the "Belt and Road" initiative, the policies of the Chinese government have attracted even more attention from governments, media, and individuals at home and abroad ^[1]. In this context, the accuracy of the translation of Chinese political discourse, especially the quadrisyllabic words (such as *tuopingongjian*, *yifazhiguo*, *qiangjunxingjun*, etc.), is

of great significance for foreign readers to understand the decisions and plans of the Chinese government and to understand China better ^[2]. However, due to different cultural backgrounds, resulting in huge differences between English and Chinese language systems, as well as the particularity of the language style of Chinese government political discourse, it is a real struggle to translate quadrisyllabic words into English.

2. Linguistic features of quadrisyllabic words

Quadrisyllabic word is a linguistic term released in 2011, referring to four-syllable words or phrases, including four-syllable words, compound words, idioms, fixed phrases, and free phrases^[3]. From ancient times to the present, the Chinese like to use quadrisyllabic words. As a way of expression, quadrisyllabic words are shining and enduring in literature from the *Book of Songs* to the classics of all dynasties. As a treasure of the extensive and profound Chinese language and culture, quadrisyllabic words have their unique advantages in modern language and culture, especially in Chinese government political discourse.

2.1. Neat structure

The structure of quadrisyllabic words conforms to the tradition of taking balance and symmetry as beauty in Chinese culture. From Chinese characters, the living fossil of Chinese culture, to ancient architecture, calligraphy, and painting, all of them are balanced and symmetrical. Quadrisyllabic words are neat with stable relationships such as juxtaposition, subject-predicate, verb object, verb complement, or restrictive relationship, highlighting the balance and overall unity between words.

2.2. Harmonious phonology

Most of the quadrisyllabic words originate from classical poetry and classical works, which have a good combination of level and oblique tones and are always sonorous and melodious^[4]. Chinese quadrisyllabic words are symmetrical and harmonious in sound, rhyme, and tone having a strong musicality. It is easier to arouse the resonance of readers when reading with a rising and falling cadence.

2.3. Concise language

Quadrisyllabic words have a long history and strong generality. Many myths and fables originating from ancient times can be concluded into quadrisyllabic words with rich connotations, which is in line with the Chinese people's preference for refined words and language. There are also some highly generalized policy terms, which are concise and clear and are also in the form of quadrisyllabic words.

3. Principles of English translation of quadrisyllabic words

The application of quadrisyllabic words in Chinese government political discourse conforms to our Party's consistent good style of seeking truth from facts^[5]. Accurate and rigorous words can convey the basic program more simply and naturally. The English translation of quadrisyllabic words in Chinese government political discourses is an important part of political translation, which should follow the principles of consistency, rigidity, and conciseness.

3.1. Consistency

Quadrisyllabic words in political discourse in the form of major policies of the Party and the Chinese government carrying a clear concept and connotation should be faithful to the original text and respect its seriousness and authority when translated into English. After the establishment of fixed standards, they should not be changed at will^[6].

Example 1: The Communist Party of China is guided by the principles of long-term coexistence, mutual oversight, sincerity, and sharing the rough times and the smooth.

3.2. Rigidity

In the process of translating quadrisyllabic words into English, the main and secondary aspects should be highlighted and the translation structure should be arranged reasonably according to the context.

Example 2: We must work hard to see that our country enjoys enduring peace and stability and that our people live and work in contentment^[7].

The above translation comes from the paragraph of the Report to the 19th CPC National Congress on The Thought and Basic Strategy of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era. Since the above involves issues of people's livelihood and social equity, on the premise of ensuring the consistency between the connotation of the source language and the theme, the matching of the context is also the key to English translation.

3.3. Conciseness

The Chinese government political discourse is extremely well-worded, concise, and neat in language and structure. Political discourse is mainly about international and domestic situations and relevant programs and policies. In order to maintain the conciseness of the translation of political discourses, the application of words and phrases and the reduction of the proportion of sentences are two common methods.

Example 3: *buwangchuxin, laojishiming.*

Remain true to our original aspiration and keep our mission firmly in mind.

4. Strategies of English translation of quadrisyllabic words

When translating Chinese government political discourses into English, we should not only be faithful to the original text but also convey the connotation of the original text to the readers concisely and clearly. Therefore, we should be as faithful as possible in the method^[8]. The basic method is free translation first, literal translation second, and the combination of literal translation and free translation as well as interpretation and annotation shall be adopted in due time^[9].

4.1. Literal translation

Literal translation does not mean translating completely word for word, but translating according to the literal meaning without too much annotation, so as to retain the style of the original text to the greatest extent and show the original translation to the readers^[10].

Example 4: The Chinese nation is a great nation; it has been through hardships and adversity but remains indomitable. The Communist Party of China is a great party, it has the courage to fight and the mettle to win^[11].

4.2. Free translation

Free translation is the best choice when there may be deviation based on the literal understanding, and literal translation is prone to cause wrong associations^[12]. In the process of free translation, the meaning of the original text will be added or deleted, but the connotation and rhetorical color of the original text will not change, and the translation and the original text will always be consistent in meaning.

Example 5: *shengtaiwenmingjianshegongzaidangdai, lizaiqianqiu.*

What we are doing today to build an ecological civilization will benefit generations to come^[13].

In Example 5, “gong” as in “gongzaidangdai” refers to “achievements,” “lizaiqianqiu,” which means “benefit future generations” is translated as “benefit generation to come”^[14]. There is no information about “qianqiu” in the translation, and the translator uses the free translation method here to freely and faithfully express the information in those two quadrisyllabic words.

4.3. Combination of literal translation and free translation

When literal translation or free translation cannot accurately convey the connotation of the original text, they are often combined for translation^[15].

Example 6: *lvshuiqingshanjiushijinshanyinshan.*

Lucid waters and lush mountains are invaluable assets and act.

In Example 6, “lvshuiqingshan” refers to beautiful scenery. The metaphor is to increase the vivid image of things by imitating the color of their appearance. As Chinese and English have different color references, sometimes they even have opposite cultural connotations^[16]. Therefore, the English translation of the Report to the 19th CPC National Congress uses “lucid” to describe water and “lush” to describe mountains. The literal translation of “lvshuiqingshan” into lucid waters and lush mountains highlights the characteristics of lush plants, mountains, and forests and also gives readers a sense of image—“beautiful mountains and clear waters.” This translation method describes the beautiful wish of “lvshuiqingshan”—a good ecological environment.

While “jinshanyinshan” emphasizes good ecology and is an “important treasure.” It directly conveys the meaning contained in the original text through free translation into invaluable assets, which is easier to understand for target readers. From the perspective of communicative translation, these two words are not translated word for word, but free translation centered on the expression of information.

4.4. Translation and annotation

By adopting the method of interpretation to deal with some

historical stories and literary and historical classics unique to our culture, we can not only maintain the linguistic characteristics of the original text but also clarify the meaning of the translated text, so that translation can truly become a bridge for smooth communication between different cultural communicators^[17].

Example 7: *liangxueyizuo*

The Party Constitution, Party regulations, and related major policy addresses and meets Party standards^[18].

In Example 7, “*liangxueyizuo*” is common sense for Chinese citizens, but it may be a completely unfamiliar concept to target readers^[19]. The translator uses communicative translation methods to improve, add, and omit content in the source text, and makes an explanatory translation according to the thinking habits of target language readers.

The English translation of quadrisyllabic words in Chinese government political discourse is a rather

complicated problem. It is particularly important to get rid of the influence of the verified use of words and their concise and rigorous structure. It is important to pay attention to the connotation of word meaning, turn complexity into simplicity, and turn falsehood into reality^[20]. Combining literal translation with free translation can make the translation more authentic, thus improving the translation efficiency so as to achieve better publicity and communication.

5. Conclusion

It is worth noting that translation is not a one-size-fits-all process, as the translation strategy may vary depending on the specific context and target audience. Furthermore, political discourse is highly sensitive and subject to interpretation, hence translators must exercise caution to maintain accuracy and impartiality in their translations.

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