

Ideologies Underlying Chinese-English News Translation Strategies: A Critical Discourse Analysis of An Example from China Daily

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Abstract:

With the aim of revealing the interplay between ideologies and translation strategies in the English translation process of Chinese political discourses, this research delves into the critical discourse analysis (CDA) of the English translation of the 2024 New Year Message by Chinese President Xi in China Daily. By examining the translation strategies like domestication, foreignization, addition, literal translation, and free translation, the study uncovers that these translation strategies are adopted in order to portray China as a nation developing with promising prospects. The primary research findings reveal how these strategies align with key ideologies including modernization and progress, stability and long-term planning, China's global role and commitment to cooperation, cultural heritage and national pride, and people-centered development. Through the critical analysis of how these strategies reflect and reinforce these ideological narratives in shaping the international perceptions of the status quo and future direction of China's growth, this research provides insights into the complex relations between translation choices and ideologies.

Keywords: Translation, Critical Discourse Analysis, Ideology, News Report, China Daily

1. Introduction

The development of China and its significant global influence and position has led to a rising demand for translation services in China, especially for political discourse, where government officials give speeches regarding political matters and issues [1]. In recent years, the fusion of translation studies with critical discourse analysis has emerged as a key research area, driven by the strict requirement for translation accuracy in the context of diplomacy and cross-cultural communication. While existing studies have established the connections between ideological underpinnings and translation choices in political discourses, a research gap lies in how domesticating and foreignizing translation strategies are used to align with certain ideologies. To fill this gap, the study will examine the application of domesticating and foreignizing translation strategies in relation to ideologies and their implications for political discourse representation, thereby enriching the current body of literature on translation and ideology.

The aim of this research is to explore the intricate interplay between ideologies and translation strategies in political discourse by solving the three main research questions, namely: (1) what ideologies are conveyed, (2) what translation strategies are employed, and (3) how these

strategies reflect and reinforce the underlying ideologies. By recognizing and analyzing the ideological underpinnings of translation, researchers can gain insights into how meaning is constructed, negotiated, and potentially manipulated in cross-cultural communication.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Translation and Ideologies

Over the past decade, the intersection of translation and ideology of news texts has been one of the research focuses, where critical discourse analysis (CDA) has become one of the primary methodologies and theoretical frameworks. The examination of the relations between translation processes and ideologies has provided valuable insights across various studies. These studies can be categorized to elucidate the complex intersection between translation and ideologies.

First of all, there are some studies demonstrating the crucial role of ideologies in translation practices by highlighting how ideological considerations influence the discourse representation in the target language [2, 3]. Based on such theoretical foundation, researchers like Liambo and Triyono have delved into lexicalization, passive voice, active voice, addition [4], self-referentiality, modality shifts [5] and other translation strategies and choices employed in

ideological translation. Additionally, translation shifts in transitivity, modality and metaphor, which are influenced by sociopolitical contexts and power dynamics, have also been found to reflect and shape ideological stances in political discourse [6], showcasing how linguistic choices reflect underlying ideologies and viewpoints.

With these translation strategies frequently used, other researchers have been devoted to digging deeper into the complex interplay between news translation and ideologies. One significant finding is that ideology exerts a profound influence on every aspect of news translation, from the selection of words to the overall framing of the TT [2]. On top of that, studies reveal that different target languages determine strategies for translating intensifiers, and, therefore, reveal the deliberate manipulation of group relations and China's image by the translators through the use of group relations [7]. Gu sheds light on the paramount importance of interpreters, the bridge between the Chinese government and foreign journalists, in bringing the views of foreign journalists closer to the Chinese government's official positions, thereby presenting a more favorable image of China [8]. Some studies highlight that translation choices such as omission, addition, and substitution are driven by ideology and are employed to present a desired image by influencing reader perceptions, shaping institutional identities, and legitimizing governmental narratives in international contexts [9, 10].

2.2 Critical Discourse Analysis

Critical Discourse Analysis has been employed as one of the primary methodological approaches to investigating the role of ideology in news translation. Previous research has demonstrated the effectiveness of CDA in uncovering the underlying ideologies of translated political discourses. For instance, Al-Hejin proposed three CDA-Translation Study models to analyze translation from an ideological perspective, which emphasizes the recontextualization of texts to reveal ideological influences in translation [11]. Moreover, some studies employ critical discourse analysis to investigate translated political discourses, focusing on language choices and power dynamics to uncover underlying ideologies through systematic analysis and critical interpretation of linguistic features within socio-political contexts [9]. Similarly, some research adopts vital discourse analysis as a framework to investigate the ideology in the translation of news headlines, focusing on textual dimensions like lexical choices, grammatical forms, additions, and omissions [4].

Overall, the application of CDA as a research methodology in exploring ideology in news translation highlights the significant impact of translators' choices on shaping perceptions as well as reflecting and reinforcing certain

political ideologies. This study has provided valuable insights into both the role of ideology in influencing the portrayal of events in news media and the complex interplay between language choices, power, and ideology in translation processes.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Material

The research material is the Chinese-English translation of Chinese President Xi's 2024 New Year Message [12], a news report selected from China Daily. The speech encompasses themes of national development, cultural heritage, international relations, and societal aspirations, serving as a rich source for studying translation strategies due to their political significance, cultural and linguistic complexities, and public interest. By analyzing the translation of this political discourse, this study aims to uncover how ideologies shape the translational process and influence the communication of political discourse and cultural values across languages, providing insights into the dynamics of cross-cultural communication and ideological transmission.

3.2 Procedure

Critical discourse analysis, according to Fairclough, is an interdisciplinary approach to the study of discourse that aims to uncover the connections between language and ideologies [13], and has been a popular methodology of translation studies in recent years. This study employs a methodological framework grounded in Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and textual analysis to examine the selected news report. Initially, a preliminary analysis is conducted to scrutinize the framing of the speech and its underlying messages. Subsequently, the research delves into a comprehensive critical discourse analysis of the text, focusing on domesticating, foreignizing and other translation choices. This methodological approach facilitates a detailed exploration of the relationship between ideologies and translation strategies in the English translation of the selected discourse. Through an examination of language choices, the study aims to illuminate how these linguistic decisions contribute to the construction of ideologies within the TT.

4. Framing

Based on the overall messages delivered in the speech, the political discourse adopts a mix of episodic and thematic framing in conveying the overarching ideology that China has been making progress for a better future.

Episodic framing typically focuses on individual events and specific examples to illustrate broader issues or

themes [14]. The speech includes references to specific achievements and events in various sectors, such as the commercial service of the C919 airliner [12], the trial voyage of the “Chinese-built large cruise ship” [12], and the missions of the “Shenzhou spaceships” [12], showcasing individual successes within the broader context of China’s innovation-driven development.

Thematic framing involves highlighting overarching themes or trends to provide a comprehensive understanding of a particular issue or topic [14]. The speech also emphasizes broader themes such as promoting high-quality development, seeking progress while maintaining stability, and pursuing development while safeguarding security. Additionally, there are references to creating an inclusive and dynamic environment for innovation, enhancing living conditions, and promoting global cooperation for a better world. These thematic elements shed light on the strategic priorities and long-term planning of China’s development, presenting a holistic view of the country’s aspirations and commitments.

Overall, the combination of episodic and thematic framing helps provide a detailed and holistic portrayal of China’s progress, challenges, and aspirations in various domains of development.

5. Translation Strategies, Ideologies, and China’s Image

5.1 Domesticating Translation

In domesticating translation, the focus is on making the TT more familiar and understandable to the target audience [15]. In the translation product of the selected discourse, domestication can be particularly seen in the following examples.

(1) Source Text (ST): “一批高端化，智能化，绿色化新型支柱产业快速崛起” [12].

Target Text (TT): “A number of advanced, smart and green industries are rapidly emerging as new pillars of the economy” [12].

(2) ST: “粮食生产‘二十连丰’，绿水青山成色更足” [12].

TT: “We have secured a bumper harvest for the 20th year in a row. Waters have become clearer and mountains greener” [12].

In example (1), the translation of “高端化，智能化，绿色化” simplifies the original expression that conveys China’s economic development strategies in the manufacturing industry, making the concepts more familiar and relatable to the target audience. In example (2), the translation provides a clear and direct interpretation of the agricultural development of China. Moreover, with the deep-rooted concept of “clear waters and green mountains

are as good as mountains of gold and silver” carrying the dialectical relationship between economic development and ecological protection in China, the phrase “绿水青山成色更足” [12] translated into “Waters have become clearer and mountains greener” [12] ensures an understandably and naturally conveyed message and directly reflects the nation’s increasing emphasis on environmental protection. Overall, domesticating translation in this discourse helps to bridge the cultural gap and makes the information more accessible, which is crucial when discussing complex topics like economic development and agricultural advancements in the global context.

5.2 Foreignizing Translation

In foreignizing translation, the emphasis is on preserving the unique cultural and linguistic elements of the ST, even if it may seem unfamiliar or exotic to the target audience [15]. The translation of the political discourse shows evident uses of foreignization by retaining the original Chinese terms or expressions in the TT to preserve the fidelity to the ST without losing the readability, ensuring that both the essence and form of the original message are conveyed effectively.

(1) ST: “雄安新区拔节生长，长江经济带活力脉动，粤港澳大湾区勇立潮头” [12].

TT: “The Xiong’an New Area is growing fast, the Yangtze River Economic Belt is full of vitality, and the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area is embracing new development opportunities” [12].

In this translation, the translation emphasizes clarity and precision in conveying specific terms related to Chinese government’s developmental policies. Instead of being translated into English equivalents. The “Xiong’an New Area” highlights China’s strategic initiative to develop new economic zones outside Beijing in an attempt to relieve congestion and promoting balanced regional development. Furthermore, “长江经济带” (Yangtze River Economic Belt) signifies China’s focus on regional economic integration and development along major river systems, which is part of broader national economic strategies. And “粤港澳大湾区” (the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area) reflects China’s commitment to integrating Hong Kong and Macao more closely with mainland economic activities. Therefore, the foreignizing translation in this case not only clarifies these policy terms, but also reflects Chinese government’s policies central to its broader goals of economic development, modernization and regional integration.

(2) ST: “良渚，二里头的文明曙光，殷墟甲骨的文字传承，三星堆的文化瑰宝，国家版本馆的文脉赓续” [12].

TT: “Discoveries at the archeological sites of Liangzhu and Erlitou tell us much about the dawn of Chinese civ-

ilization. The ancient Chinese characters inscribed on oracle bones of the Yin Ruins, the cultural treasures of the Sanxingdui Site, and the collections of the National Archives of Publications and Culture bear witness to the evolution of Chinese culture” [12].

Liangzhu, Erlitou, Yin Ruins, and Sanxingdui are significant archaeological sites in China that represent different periods of Chinese history and culture. By preserving the Chinese phonetics like “Liangzhu”, “Erlitou” and “Yin Ruins,” this translation not only conveys the resistance to Western cultural hegemony, but also promotes a more authentic representation of Chinese cultural concepts, thereby reflecting China’s cultural confidence in its rich historical and cultural heritage.

5.3 Addition

Apart from domestication and foreignization, which balance the information gap due to cultural differences in cross-cultural communication, the translation also incorporates extra information or clarifications in the English version to provide a more comprehensive understanding for the target audience.

ST: “大家记住了一年的不易，也对未来充满信心” [12].

TT: “We will remember this year as one of hard work and perseverance. Going forward, we have full confidence in the future” [12].

The added “perseverance” and “going forward” in the above example highlight the notion of hard work and perseverance, indicating that despite facing challenges and obstacles, there has been a commitment to overcoming difficulties through sustained effort and dedication. This reflects the ideology that China’s development is built on a resilient spirit, a commitment to hard work and perseverance, and a deep-rooted confidence in the country’s ability to overcome challenges and achieve progress.

5.4 Literal Translation

Literal translation focuses on translating the words and phrases from the source language to the target language without significant modifications or interpretations, leading to a more direct and word-for-word translation. In the following examples, the literal translation closely follows the structure of the original Chinese text, conveying the meaning in a straightforward manner without introducing additional embellishments or interpretations. Without deviating from the literal meaning of the words, the translation aims to provide a faithful representation of the ST. With the words “inspiring” and “simple,” the first translation directly mirrors the ideology that China has ambitious yet straightforward goals for development, emphasizing the nation’s determination and practical approach toward

progress. And the second example highlights China’s commitment to boosting economic vitality and dedication to sustained growth and prosperity.

(1) ST: “我们的目标很宏伟，也很朴素” [12].

TT: “Our goal is both inspiring and simple” [12].

(2) ST: “全面深化改革开放，进一步提振发展信心，增强经济活力” [12].

TT: “deepen reform and opening up across the board, further enhance people’s confidence in development, promote vibrant development of the economy” [12].

5.5 Free Translation

Free translation allows for a more creative and expressive rendering of the original content while still capturing the essence and key ideas. In other words, translators have more flexibility to restructure or rewrite the ST in order to convey the original meaning in a more natural and idiomatic way.

(1) ST: “东北全面振兴谱写新篇，雄安新区拔节生长，长江经济带活力脉动，粤港澳大湾区勇立潮头” [12].

TT: “New progress has been made in fully revitalizing northeast China. The Xiong’an New Area is growing fast, the Yangtze River Economic Belt is full of vitality, and the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area is embracing new development opportunities” [12].

(2) ST: “新能源汽车，锂电池，光伏产品给中国制造增添了新亮色” [12].

TT: “New energy vehicles, lithium batteries, and photovoltaic products are a new testimony to China’s manufacturing prowess” [12].

(3) ST: “中国以自强不息的精神奋力攀登，到处都是日新月异的创造” [12].

TT: “Everywhere across our country, new heights are being scaled with dogged determination, and new creations and innovations are emerging every day” [12].

The translation captures the essence of the original text by expressing the progress and development in different regions of China (i.e. the Xiong’an New Area, the Yangtze River Economic Belt, and the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area) more naturally. The use of phrases like “New progress has been made” and “growing fast” provides a more interpretative and contextually relevant translation of the ST. The translation emphasizes the dynamic and energetic nature of these regions. In the second example, the expression “are a new testimony to” has been chosen to capture the idea that these products not only contribute to China’s manufacturing might but also represent an area of growth and innovation, offering a more subtle understanding of the original meaning. By employing a free translation strategy, the translator aims to convey the ideology that China is developing with rapid economic growth, innovation, and a vibrant business

environment that drives progress and prosperity.

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, the CDA of Chinese President Xi's New Year Message reveals the prominent ideological underpinnings conveyed in the political discourse, namely the core ideology of China as a nation in progressive development with a promising future, and key ideologies such as modernization, progress, stability, and China's long-term planning of development. Moreover, the discourse emphasizes China's role as a global actor committed to international cooperation and responsibility, while also highlighting China's rich cultural heritage, historical achievements, and national pride. The examination of the interplay between ideology and Chinese-English translation elucidates how translation choices can influence perceptions and effectively communicate ideological messages, and that translation strategies do make a difference to the intended meanings and ideologies of Chinese political discourses to an English-speaking audience.

The limitations of this study primarily stem from the absence of corpus-based studies. Therefore, future research endeavors could benefit from a more solid foundation by conducting corpus-based CDA of Chinese-English translations of political discourse as presented in Chinese media. This mixed approach would offer a more systematic and data-driven exploration of the interplay between ideologies and translation strategies, providing deeper insights into the complexities of cross-cultural communication and ideological transmission in political discourse translation.

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