

Research Article

A Study on The translation of Personal Subject and Modal Verb in President Xi Jinping's Speech at the Second Belt and Road Forum

Tian Dong¹ & Jingjing Zhang*²

¹Professor in School of Foreign Languages, North China Electric Power University, NO 689 Road, North District, Baoding, Hebei, China

²Graduate Student in School of Foreign Languages, North China Electric Power University, NO 689 Road, North District, Baoding, Hebei, China

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Abstract: Since the Belt and Road Initiative was proposed, some people in the foreign countries have taken a skeptical attitude towards it, even oppose it. Xi Jinping addressed a speech at the opening ceremony of the Second Belt and Road forum for International Cooperation. The interpersonal meaning of the speech plays a key role in eliminating some people's misunderstanding of the Belt and Road Initiative. Systemic-Functional linguists hold that interpersonal function is mainly realized through mood system, modal system and evaluation system. This paper studies personal subjects and modal verbs in Chinese and English version of this speech to explore the translation strategies of personal subjects and modal verbs in political speeches.

Keywords: Xi Jinping's speech; the Belt and Road Initiative; personal subjects; modal verbs

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INTRODUCTION

The Belt and Road Initiative has received more and more attention around the world since it was proposed. Most people are for it, but some take a skeptical attitude towards it, even oppose it. In the past six years, the construction of "Belt And Road" has achieved fruitful results. The second Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation was held in Beijing in 2019. Xi Jinping addressed a series of speeches during the opening of forum. As the advocate and country leader, his speeches play a key role in eliminating some foreigners' misunderstanding of The Belt and Road Initiative.

Systemic-Functional linguists claim that language has three functions: ideational function, interpersonal function and textual function. Speech, as a kind of publicizing and agitation communication activity, the realization of interpersonal function is more important than the realization of other two functions. Interpersonal function can build and maintain interpersonal relationships, influence others' behavior, get audiences' support to the speaker's opinion or make supplementary comments. It can be achieved through

mood system, modal system and evaluation system. Mood system includes subject and definite. Modal system includes modal verbs and modal adjunct. Evaluation system includes attitude, engagement and graduation.

This paper studies the Chinese and English version of the speech addressed at the opening ceremony of the Second Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation by Xi Jinping, and analyzes the translation of personal subject and modal verbs to find out the translation strategy.

LITERATURE REVIEW

As the country's leader of China, Xi Jinping's speeches have attracted the attention of many experts and professors in many fields. Studies on the translation of his speeches are carried out from a lot of different perspectives. The focus of traditional translation studies is on the translation of characteristic vocabulary in Xi Jinping's speeches from the perspective of literal translation, foreignizing translation, domesticating translation and so on (Dou & Wen, 2015; Han, 2018). These studies pay more attention to semantic level of

the speech content. With the development of pragmatics, the principle of pragmatic equivalent translation is gradually applied to the study (Liu, 2017). Based on this translation principle, the translation mistakes which appear due to cultural differences can be decreased, and the equivalent between the original and target text can be achieved to a large degree. In recent years, people have paid great attention to ecology. Some experts conduct the study on translation of Xi Jinping's speech from the perspective of eco-translatology. Different from other translation principles, eco-translatology focuses on the ecological environment of translation. As the proposer of eco-translatology, Hu Gengshen(2008) claims that the translation process is an alternant and recurrent process in which the translator adapts and makes selection. The principle of translation is the selective adaptation and adaptive selection. The latter means that the translator should make adaptive selection based on three-dimensional translation principle—language, communication and culture. The translation of political speeches should focus more on the communication and culture dimension. So the translator should make adaptation well to original and target language and use the reconstruction strategy well (Liu, 2019; Chu, 2019).

With the development of cognitive linguistics and social linguistics, a number of studies are carried out from the perspective of metaphor and critical linguistics. Chen Xiaoqiang (2018) conducted the study on the political metaphor in Xi Jinping's speech from the perspective of positive metaphor analysis. Guo Chahong (2012) carried out the study on the influence of translational ideology which contains media's political attitudes, translators' emotions of nationalism, and target readers' values and expectations.

A great many scholars conducted studies from the perspective of systemic-functional linguistics. JiaHai'e (2019) made a contrastive analysis of the figurative expressions in Xi Jinping's speech from the perspective of transitivity. Zhang Zhibin (2019) also researched the transitivity participants and their processes in the construction of China's national image from the same perspective.

The studies mentioned above have enriched the study perspectives on the translation of Xi Jinping's speech, and have an irreplaceable effect on publicizing the spirit of Xi Jinping's speech. However, the focuses of these studies are all on the ideational meaning of language, and the realization of interpersonal meaning is not studied. Therefore, employing the theory of systemic-functional linguistics as the theoretical foundation, this thesis makes a contrastive analysis of personal subject and modal verb between Chinese and English version of Xi Jinping's speech addressed at the opening ceremony of the Second Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation, aiming to research the

translation strategy of personal subject and modal verb.

The Interpersonal Function of Chinese and English

Interpersonal function is one of three functions of language proposed by Systemic-Functional linguists. It means that people communicate with others with language to build and maintain interpersonal relationship, affect others' behaviors using language and also expect audience make definite and indefinite reply to their opinions or make supplementary comments (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2013:138). Systemic-Functional linguists claim that one of the approaches to realize interpersonal function is modal system. Eggins(1994:192) ever pointed out that when we are asked how the language is organized which can meet the communication demand, the answer is to depend mainly on the mood and modal system.

Modal system is the common semantic system in both Chinese and English. It is the important language resource to realize interpersonal function. From the perspective of semantics, Chinese modal system and English modal system all can express the meaning that the speaker wants audience to grasp. From the perspective of pragmatic function, they can promote the communication to develop further (Peng, 2000: 124). However, there are also huge differences between Chinese modal system and English modal system, mainly lying in language features, pragmatic expressions and cultural features (Li, 2012). English modal verbs have the same features in syntactic, so there is no great difficult in determining the modal verbs. Commonly, English modal verbs are *may, can, ought to, must, will, shall, need, dare, might, could, would, should* and so on. On the other hand, English modal verbs can be combined with grammatical categories such as tense and aspects, so they have diversified forms and features and their modal meaning are more specific such as cognitive modality and deontic modality. Chinese modal verbs have multiple meanings. For example, “要” can express intension, speculation, need, will (approach in prediction), estimation(approach in data, used in comparative sentence). The same function or meaning can be realized or expressed by different forms, and the same form can represent different functions and meanings. The semantic domain of English modal verbs is much bigger than the semantic domain of Chinese modal verbs (Lai, 2006:70) . As for the value of the modal verbs, English modal verbs have clear division of value, and Chinese modal verbs haven't specific value.

Political speech is different from other kinds of speech. It involves some political opinions, so the attitude of the speaker must be conveyed much accurately. Considering this situation, the realization of the interpersonal function of political speech is much important.

Personal Subject and Modal Verb Analysis in Xi Jinping's Speeches

This paper selected Xi Jinping's speech addressed at the opening ceremony of the Second Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation as the corpus, make a contrastive study on the personal subject and modal verb in Chinese version and English version to study the translation strategy of personal subject and modal verb.

1. The English translation of personal subject

When this speech is translated into English, seven personal subjects are changed, in which two personal subjects are changed into formal subjects, and four active sentences are changed into passive sentences. The subject changes in these sentences don't lead to the change of interpersonal meaning. Only one subject change leads to the change of interpersonal meaning.

Example 1. 未来5年，中国将邀请共建“一带一路”国家的政党、智库、民间组织等1万名代表来华交流。

To this end, we will, in the coming five years, invite 10,000 representatives of political parties, think tanks and non-governmental organizations from Belt and Road participating countries to visit China.

In this example, the subject in Chinese is *China*. However, it was translated into *We* in English. The object attitude of Chinese sentence was transferred to subject attitude in English. From the perspective of interpersonal function, this emphasizes our sincere attitude to invite 10,000 representatives of political parties, think tanks and non-governmental organizations from Belt and Road participating countries to visit China, which can help build friendly relationship between the speaker and audiences.

2. The English translation of modal verbs

After the analysis of modal verbs in Xi Jinping's speech addressed at the opening ceremony of the Second Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation, the number of the modal verbs in Chinese is 5 which are 要, 愿意, 愿, 应该, 能够. There are three kinds of translation strategies.

(1) The value of modal verbs in the translation is as same as that in the original.

Example 2. 我们要促进贸易和投资自由化便利化，旗帜鲜明反对保护主义，推动经济全球化朝着更加开放、包容、普惠、平衡、共赢的方向发展。

We need to promote trade and investment liberalization and facilitation, say no to protectionism, and make economic globalization more open, inclusive, balanced and beneficial to all.

In this sentence, the Chinese modal verb is 要 whose value is high. It was translated into English modal verb *need* whose value is also high. This translation strategy is determined by the commonality of English and Chinese modal verbs. As is said above, Chinese and English all consider modal verb as an important grammatical category system to express modal meaning. They have the same features and express same semantic meaning (Li, 2012). As long as there is no limitation of context, we should keep the value of modal verb in original text and target text equal to ensure accurate expression of the original modal meaning. As for the translation of modal verbs in political text, the translator should think carefully and make suitable decision.

(2) The value of modal verb are lowered in target text

Example 3. 面向未来，我们要聚焦重点、深耕细作，共同绘制精谨细腻的工笔画，推动共建“一带一路”沿着高质量发展方向不断前进。

Going ahead, we should focus on priorities and project execution, move forward with results-oriented implementation, just like an architect refining the blueprint, and jointly promote high-quality Belt and Road cooperation.

Example 4. 我们要努力实现高标准、惠民生、可持续目标，引入各方普遍支持的规则标准，推动企业在项目建设、运营、采购、招投标等环节按照普遍接受的国际规则标准进行，同时要尊重各国法律法规。

We need to pursue high standard cooperation to improve people's lives and promote sustainable development. We will adopt widely accepted rules and standards and encourage participating companies to follow general international rules and standards in project development, operation, procurement and tendering and bidding. The laws and regulations of participating countries should also be respected.

In Example 3, Chinese modal verb is 要 whose value is high. However, it was translated to *should* whose value is medium. So the value of the target modal verb is lower than the value of the original modal verb. Meanwhile, in Example 4, the active sentence in Chinese is changed to a passive sentence in English. From the perspective of construction of modal meaning, the modal meaning expressed by English passive sentence is weaker than that expressed by Chinese active sentence (Li, 2012). This translation strategy takes the differences of thinking way between Chinese and English into consideration. The thinking mode of Chinese and English is subject thinking and object thinking respectively (Liu, 2010: 486). Influenced by subject thinking, Chinese usually use high value modal verb to highlight subjectivity and authority. But English

emphasizes reason and pursue language to be objective, impartial and rigorous, which decreases the command and authority of language so audiences could accept opinions easily.

(3) No modal verbs in target text

Example 5. 我们发起了《廉洁丝绸之路北京倡议》，愿同各方共建风清气正的丝绸之路。

The Beijing Initiative for Clean Silk Road has been launched, which represents our strong **commitment** to transparency and clean governance in pursuing Belt and Road cooperation.

In this example, the Chinese modal verb is 愿. Instead of translating it to English modal verb, the translator conveys its meaning using a noun *commitment*, which is called nominalization. Systemic-Functional linguists declare that nominalization can meet some special demands of communication because it has special communication function. Critical discourse analysis reveals the relationship between language and ideology which can't be perceived by people easily through study on nominalization. The study showed that nominalization can make the text more formal and authoritative, and affect the establishing and maintenance of interpersonal relationship among speech participants to a large extent, which affects the final realization of communication aim. In this example, the high value modal verb 愿 shows China's strong commitment to transparency and clean governance in pursuing Belt and Road cooperation, so the translator uses the nominalization to make language more rigorous and formal so that audiences can grasp the real attitude of Xi Jinping.

CONCLUSION

Country leaders' speech is different from other kinds of speech. It has strong political complexion. So when translating political speech, the translator should neither translate vocabulary simply, nor pursue language smooth and semantic accurate only. The target language should convey the modal meaning of the original language accurately. Through analyzing personal subject and modal verb in Chinese and English version of Xi Jinping's speech addressed at the opening ceremony of the Second Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation, the translator takes the differences of Chinese and Western thinking way and value into consideration, and changes personal subjects to emphasize the theme; the translation strategy of modal verbs are diversified. Some modal verbs' value in the translation is as same as that in the original, some are lowered, and some Chinese modal verbs are not translated into English modal verbs. These translation strategies make the target speech text convey the speaker's modal attitude accurately, meanwhile, make audience accept the speaker's opinion more easily.

Therefore, when translating political speeches, different and common features of Chinese and English modal system should be considered, and the translator should translate personal subject and modal verbs skillfully and neatly. Conveying the speaker's modal attitude accurately can avoid misunderstanding caused by translation, which can promote positive cooperation among countries and push the cooperation to develop steadily and harmoniously.

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