

Shifts in the English Translation of Appreciation Resources in Political Speeches

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Abstract: With the Appraisal Theory of Systemic Functional Linguistics as the theoretical framework, this paper discusses translation shifts of appreciation resources realized by content words at the register and genre levels, as well as the driving factors underlying such shifts. This study takes as its corpus the English translations of fourteen full speeches by China's top leader published by Foreign Languages Press in 2014 and primarily employs a qualitative approach. The study shows that meaning shifts may emerge in domestic translators' renderings of state leaders' political speeches, as translators seek to achieve interpersonal functional equivalence through linguistic choices. From this perspective, translation can be viewed as the translator's social practice.

Keywords: Appraisal theory; English translation of political speech; Appreciation resources; Shift

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1. Introduction

Translation shifts refer to linguistic deviations from the original text, changes introduced in translation with respect to either the syntactic form or the meaning of the source text ^[1]. As an inevitable feature of translation activity, shifts have received diverse interpretations across scholarly schools. The linguistic school of translation studies attributes shifts to divergent encoding mechanisms inherent to distinct languages. The cultural school accounts for shifts with cross-cultural disparities: constrained by dominant poetics, mainstream ideology and patrons, translators often rewrite source texts. Scholars of Descriptive Translation Studies hold that translational norms motivate the shifts and substantially regulate translators' decision-making.

Interpersonal metafunction denotes the use of language to engage in interpersonal communication, establish and maintain social relations, exert influence over others' attitudes and behaviors, and elicit affirmative or negative responses from addressees ^[2]. A core objective of political speeches is to articulate the speaker's viewpoints and stances, and establish international relations the speaker aspires to build. The

fulfillment of such objectives hinges on the speaker's standing within global social networks, the tangled interests of all stakeholders, and translators' translation practice. To achieve interpersonal functional equivalence in political speech translation, translators make adjustments to target texts, thereby triggering translational shifts, which fall into three categories: attitudinal, engagement, and graduation shifts ^[3].

Due to the distinctive nature of political speeches, linguistic fidelity is attached great importance to their translation ^[4-6]. However, as the linguistic school lost its dominant position in translation studies and postmodern thinking surged, some scholars ^[7-9] held that political speeches can be adjusted for certain reasons, such as translators' standpoints and ideologies: discrepancies in translators' stances or divergent dominant ideologies in different societies can generate shifts in translated political speeches ^[10-12]. But can semantic shifts emerge when domestic translators led by their own government translate political speeches delivered by their national leaders? If such shifts exist, what factors trigger them? Are the speaker's political intentions fulfilled after shifts take place? These are the three research questions this paper tries to answer.

2. The appraisal theory in English and Chinese contexts

Developed within the framework of the interpersonal metafunction in Systemic Functional Linguistics, Appraisal Theory explores interpersonal metafunction at the lexical level. According to the theory, speakers articulate their stances, convey their interpersonal intentions, and affect the audience's viewpoints and behaviors through three interrelated subsystems: Attitude, Engagement and Graduation. The Attitude system, which focuses on feelings, the evaluation of things and human behaviors, falls into three subcategories: Affect, Judgment and Appreciation ^[13], each with positive and negative dimensions. Appreciation primarily concerns the evaluation of things. This study centers on translation shifts concerning Appreciation resources.

Appreciation refers to positive or negative assessments of texts, processes, natural phenomena and other entities, which are further divided into three subcategories: Reaction, Composition and Valuation. Reaction deals with people's responses to things, such as whether an object draws attention or evokes fondness. Composition concerns an entity's balance and complexity. Valuation assesses an entity's intrinsic worth, including its innovativeness, authenticity and timeliness. In the corpus of this study, translation shifts of Appreciation resources concentrate mostly on Valuation. This may stem from the nature of political speeches: delivered by state leaders, they directly voice a social group's or nation's stances on international issues.

Martin & White (2012) ^[13] illustrate positive and negative Appreciation values in English with a list of adjectives, while also noting that nouns and verbs may carry Appreciation meanings under certain contextual conditions ^[13]. Chinese scholarship maintains that positive and negative semantic coloring constitutes the fundamental feature of human assessments of qualities and processes ^[14]. The content words, including evaluative verbs, nouns and adjectives, convey rich appraisal meanings ^[15]. Thus, domestic and overseas scholars reach a consensus that nouns, verbs and adjectives are core analytical units for exploring Appraisal meanings.

Appreciation embodies collective social values, which may even become institutionalized. Individual attitudes and evaluations are closely intertwined with value systems inculcated by educational, legal, cultural and other social institutions; these institutions jointly construct mainstream culture and form overarching socio-cultural contexts. From a cross-cultural perspective, societies diverge in their educational frameworks, legal systems and core values, leading to disparate standards for Appreciation evaluation.

Lexical Appreciation meanings embedded in political speeches cannot be analyzed in isolation from

context. Martin discusses context through two dimensions: register and genre. Register covers the topic in discussion, interpersonal tenor between participants, and communicative mode adopted. A genre denotes a staged, goal-oriented social process ^[16]. Genre sits at a higher hierarchical level than register; it relies on register and is realized through register. Martin's distinction between register and genre echoes Malinowski's (1966) ^[17] division between context of situation and context of culture. The context of situation refers to the concrete immediate environment of linguistic interaction, whereas the context of culture denotes the overarching cultural backdrop. Register corresponds broadly to Malinowski's context of situation, while genre aligns with the context of culture.

Constrained by contextual factors operating at both register and genre levels, to accurately convey the speaker's interpersonal intentions, translators adjust linguistic expressions and thereby generate translation shifts. Accordingly, this study investigates shifts of Appreciation meanings in political speech translations across register and genre layers. Shifts at the register level are analyzed through nouns, adjectives, and verbs, while shifts at the genre level are explored from the socio-cultural contextual perspective.

3. Findings and discussion

This paper selected the 14 full speeches, delivered by China's top leader in 2013 and 2014, published by Foreign Languages Press in 2014 and their official English versions as its corpus. Both the Chinese and English versions were published in 2014 by Foreign Languages Press, with translators from the China Foreign Languages Publishing Administration (CFLPA) undertaking the translation work. Under the leadership of the Publicity Department of the CPC Central Committee, the CFLPA holds the same political stance as the deliverer of the speeches, yet substantial shifts can be observed in its English translations of the selected political speeches. Adopting a primarily qualitative research methodology, this paper seeks to interpret the causes of such shifts and how the appraisal meanings of appreciation resources are conveyed in translation.

Based on the corpus of this study, the table below details the distribution of translation shifts of appreciation resources.

Table 1. Distribution of translation shifts of appreciation resources in political speeches

Speech Title	Total Chinese Characters	Number of Shifts	Frequency of Shifts
Be Trustworthy Friends and Sincere Partners Forever	4362	16	1/270 characters
Work Hand in Hand for Common Development	2041	17	1/120 characters
A Better Future for Asia and the World	3477	16	1/217 characters
Jointly Maintain and Develop an Open World Economy	2834	10	1/283 characters
Carry Forward the "Shanghai Spirit" and Promote Common Development	1854	3	1/618 characters
Work Together for a Better Asia Pacific	5388	6	1/898 characters
Follow the Trend of the Times and Promote Global Peace and Development	4203	15	1/280 characters
Address to the First Session of the 12 th National People's Congress	3127	13	1/241 characters
Young People Should Practice the Core Socialist Values	6064	29	1/209 characters
New Approach for Asian Security Cooperation	3522	27	1/130 characters
Foster and Practice Core Socialist Values from Childhood	3049	11	1/277 characters
Together Fulfill the Chinese Dream of National Rejuvenation	2621	18	1/146 characters

Promote the Silk Road Spirit, Strengthen China-Arab Cooperation	3892	27	1/144 characters
Follow a Sensible, Coordinated and Balanced Approach to Nuclear Security	2451	13	1/189 characters
Total	48885	221	1/221 characters

As illustrated by the statistics above, within the corpus of over 48,000 words, translation shifts of appreciation resources emerge once every 221 Chinese characters, which shows that such shifts are a common translational phenomenon. As elaborated in the previous section, shifts of appreciation resources in political speech translations fall into two analytical dimensions: register and genre. The subsequent section elaborates translation shifts from these two layers in detail.

3.1. Shifts in the English translation of appreciation resources at the register level

In the subsequent sections, this paper explores shifts of appreciation resources within political speech translation through separate analysis of appraisal-laden nouns, adjectives and verbs.

3.1.1. Translation shifts of nominal appreciation resources

Through reinterpreting nominal appraisal resources in the example below, translators convey the speaker's political interpersonal meanings with greater precision.

Example 1: 中国将以建设性姿态参与地区事务，主持公道、伸张正义，同阿拉伯国家一道，推动通过对话找到各方关切的最大公约数，为妥善解决地区热点问题提供更多公共产品。

China will play a constructive role in regional affairs, speak up for justice, and work with the Arab states to encourage dialogue as a way to find the greatest common denominator on issues of concern to all parties. We will direct a greater level of diplomatic effort to the proper settlement of regional flashpoints.

The example above is taken from *Promote the Silk Road Spirit, Strengthen China-Arab Cooperation*, a speech delivered in 2014 at the opening ceremony of the Sixth Ministerial Conference of the China-Arab States Cooperation Forum. According to a report from the Xinhua News Agency dated 14 November 2014, Chinese leaders repeatedly referred to the provision of global public goods to the international community since 2014. This shows China's willingness to take greater international responsibilities, which aligns with the demands of China at a new stage of development.

Lu Feng, Professor and Doctoral Supervisor at the National School of Development, Peking University, points out that, broadly speaking, global public goods cover products, services, institutional rules, infrastructure and public opinion formation that generate beneficial spillover effects across global spheres.

The source phrase “global public goods” is rendered as “a greater level of diplomatic effort” in the target text, an expression with a broader semantic scope that encompasses intergovernmental consultations and mediation alongside the provision of global public goods. Most Arab nations adhere to Islam, and Arab civilization diverges sharply from Chinese culture shaped by Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism. Arab publics generally possess limited understanding of China's peaceful development narrative and the national image China aims to project. Even elite groups and government decision-makers hold incomplete perceptions on these matters ^[18]. Thus mutual recognition between China and Arab nations remains insufficient. Against this backdrop, China faces obstacles in supplying global public goods such as impartial narratives, institutional norms and concrete solutions to Middle Eastern flashpoints.

Nevertheless, since the turn of the 21st century, Arab countries have strengthened economic ties with

major Asian economies to varying degrees, which constitutes a proactive “Eastward Diplomacy” by Arab states to cope with shifts in the international landscape and address their domestic development requirements. So China-Arab relations have improved in recent years, making it feasible for China to direct diplomatic efforts to certain regional hotspot issues ^[19]. Translators thus re-evaluate the “global public goods” as “diplomatic effort”, a rendition more acceptable to the target audience. Furthermore, delivering “a greater level of diplomatic effort” manifests China’s soft power to a certain extent and facilitates the gradual construction of China’s international identity of a “responsible major country”.

3.1.2. Translation shifts of adjectival appreciation resources

By reinterpreting adjectival appreciation resources in the source texts as illustrated in the following example, translators help construct a more positive international image for the Chinese government.

Example 2: 根据联合国标准, 中国还有 1.28 亿人生活在贫困线以下。让 13 亿多人民都过上富裕的日子, 仍然还有很长的路要走, 还需要付出长期的艰苦努力。

Some 128 million Chinese are still living below the poverty line set by the United Nations. To provide a decent life for the over 1.3 billion people, we still have a long way to go, and persistent and strenuous efforts are called for.

This example above is taken from *Be Trustworthy Friends and Sincere Partners Forever*, a speech delivered in Tanzania in 2013 and targeted at Tanzanians, other African nations, and the whole international community. In the Chinese source text, the term “富裕” solely refers to economic prosperity. In the target text, according to Merriam-Webster and Collins Dictionaries, the adjective “decent” bears two core definitions: (1)conforming to standards of propriety, good taste, or morality;(2)describing something which is considered to be of an acceptable standard or quality. Semantically, “decent” covers a far broader scope than its Chinese counterpart “富裕” and is not restricted to economic dimensions alone.

The translator reframes the original “富裕日子 (affluent life)” as a “decent life”, which conveys to the international community that the Chinese government emphasizes not only material gains for its people but also all-round progress in cultural attainment and other fields, projecting a more favorable image of China and its people worldwide.

3.1.3. Translation shifts of verbal appreciation resources

By reinterpreting verbal appreciation resources in the subsequent example, the translator articulates the Chinese government’s stance and makes it easy for audiences to accept.

Example 3: 在这方面, 中国采取的经济政策既对中国经济负责, 也对世界经济负责。

In this regard, China adopts its economic policies not only for the good of its own economy, but for the good of the world economy as well.

The example above is taken from *Jointly Maintain and Develop an Open World Economy*, delivered in 2013 at Section I of the G20 Leaders’ Summit. The Group of Twenty (G20) evolved from the original Group of Seven (G7). It represents the institutionalized form of global governance that emerged amid competition between developed economies and emerging markets, epitomized by China, Russia, Brazil and India ^[20]. Bolstered by their growing strength, emerging economies are no longer content with participating in global governance. Instead, they seek to design brand-new global governance frameworks based on their own wisdom, capacities and aspirations, which inevitably triggers intense strategic contest with established

developed economies^[21]. From this perspective, inherent contradictions persist among all G20 member states.

In light of China's rapidly expanding economic strength, if China's economic policies uphold accountability to the global economy, as stated in the source text, misunderstandings and anxiety may arise within US-led Western countries. In this address, China calls on all countries to remove trade barriers and pursue open economic systems, from the overarching vision of building a community with a shared future for humanity. Grasping the central message of the address, the translator reinterprets the original term “负责 (responsible)” as “for the good of”, meaning that China's economic policies are beneficial for both its own economy and the global economy. This translation unites the international community, disseminates the Chinese government's proposition of fostering a world economy featuring innovative development, interconnected growth and integrated interests, and conveys the speaker's interpersonal political intentions with greater precision.

3.2. Shifts in English translation of appreciation resources at the genre level

Meanings encoded at the cultural context (Genre) level supersede linguistic meanings realized in situational contexts (register) and carry a high level of generality. Linguistic meanings concretize cultural context. In other words, the evaluative appreciation meanings are conferred by cultural context. Thus, shifts of appreciation meanings emerge in the translation of political speeches due to disparities in cultural contexts, as illustrated in the following example.

Example 4: 五四运动以来，一代又一代有志青年”以青春之我，创建青春之家庭，青春之国家，青春之民族，青春之人类，青春之地球，青春之宇宙”，在救亡图存、振兴中华的历史洪流中谱写了一曲曲感天动地的青春乐章。

Since the May 4th Movement, generations of highly motivated young men and women have written inspiring chapters in the struggles to save the country and rejuvenate the Chinese nation, with the motto “Devoting my youth to creating a family of youth, a country of youth, a nation of youth, a mankind of youth, a planet of youth and a universe of youth.”

The above example is extracted from *Young People Should Practice the Core Socialist Values*. The term “有志青年” in the source text refers to young people with noble aspirations tied to social wellbeing, carrying profound cultural connotations in the Chinese context. Such young people can disregard their own gain or loss, glory or shame, or even sacrifice their lives for national interests and social progress, which is an implication absent in the English cultural context. Anglo-American culture prioritizes individualism and advocates personal endeavor as a pathway to success and well-being^[22]. Audiences from English-speaking backgrounds may fail to grasp the greatness and nobility of “有志青年”.

Therefore, translators avoid renderings such as “youth with lofty aspirations”. To align with target-language culture, which to some extent frames human beings as goal-driven individuals, translators render “有志青年” as “highly motivated young men and women”. This translation conveys to the audience that Chinese youth take the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation as their lifelong pursuit, thereby enabling the smooth transmission of the interpersonal function.

4. Conclusion

This paper shows that in political speech translation, the translator can adjust the appreciation resources in the target texts through the selection of content words, namely nouns, adjectives and verbs with full

consideration of the speaker's interpersonal political intentions, the overall discursive tenor of the source texts, the prevailing international context of the period, and the dual contextual dimensions of register and genre.

Accordingly, this study addresses the research questions raised at the outset: semantic shifts do occur when domestic translators render political speeches delivered by their national leaders. Such shifts emerge because translators prioritize faithfully conveying the speeches' interpersonal meanings and political intentions rather than rigidly adhering to literal semantic minutiae of the source text. Such translation shifts permit the speaker's political stances to be transmitted with greater accuracy, granting translators the flexibility to adjust interpersonal proximity to target audiences. Consequently, the desired political connections between the speaker and the international community can be forged, fulfilling the intended political goals of the speech. From this viewpoint, translation acts as a mode of social practice for translators^[23], who deliver the source texts' interpersonal function effectively by making conscious lexical choices.

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