

Discourse Translation of Political Speeches from the Perspective of Systemic Functional Grammar

-- A Case Study of the Chinese Translation of the Queen's Christmas Speech in 2019

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Abstract: This study takes the Chinese translation of the Queen's Christmas Speech in 2019 as the object, aiming to explore its application in the translation of political speeches by using the features of ideational function, textual function and interpersonal function of systemic functional grammar, so as to prove the feasibility of the theory of systemic functional grammar in the English translation of public speeches, maintaining the equivalence between the translated text and the original text in terms of semantics, logic and pragmatics.

Keywords: Systemic Functional Grammar, Discourse Translation of Political Speech, the Queen's Christmas Speech.

1. Introduction

Nowadays, most leaders have delivered a variety of speeches in front of the people, especially political speeches, which are a type of speech that people are very concerned about. From the political speeches of most leaders, readers can understand the speaker's social, cultural, historical background and ideology. Christmas speeches delivered by the Queen or King of the United Kingdom have played an important role in consolidating national unity. Therefore, the translation of Queen Elizabeth's Christmas speech is very important to convey its language skills and deep meaning to all world. The translator should pay attention to the language style, cultural connotation and deep meaning of the original text, and follow the language habits and expression rules of the target language. Only in this way can we ensure that the translation can accurately convey the Queen's intention and have a positive impact on readers.

2. Systemic Functional Grammar

In the field of linguistic research, before the establishment of Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics, the London School with Malinowsky and Firth as the core proposed that language research must pay attention to the use and context of language. Founder M.A.K. Halliday believes that language is a resource system for meaning expression in context, and linguistics aims to study how people convey meaning through language (Meixia Li, 2006). It emphasizes the function and practical role of language, pays attention to the precise expression of language content, language meaning and language color, and puts forward that language has three meta-functions in Systemic-Functional Grammar, namely, ideational function, textual function and interpersonal function.

Ideational function refers to the expression of language to people's various experiences in the objective world (including the inner world) (Halliday, 1994).

Interpersonal function refers to the interaction between the

speaker and the hearer. That is, people use words to interact with others and establish interpersonal relationships in a specific context. The theory of interpersonal function includes the mood system, the modality system and the person system (Yongsheng Zhu, Shiqing Yan, Xingwei Miao, 2004).

Textual function refers to a mechanism in language that can organize any oral or written discourse into a coherent and unified text, making a living speech information fragment different from a random array of sentences (Zhuanlin Hu, 2011:293,296).

According to Systemic Functional Linguistics, language consists of three metafunctions, which are subject to situational context and cultural context (Halliday, 1994).

Based on the current state of research, the author takes Queen Elizabeth II's 2019 Christmas speech as a research object. This paper will use Halliday's Systemic Functional Grammar to analyze political speech discourse and its translation, so as to summarize the principles and methods of political speech discourse translation as well as providing ideas for subsequent political discourse translation, reducing unnecessary translation errors and providing a reference for language researchers and learners.

3. Text Analysis

3.1. Reproduction of Ideational function in the translation of Political Speech

In the previous part, it has been discussed that the ideational meta-function is a kind of grammar for interpreting and exchanging our inner and outer experience of the world. The ideational function is mainly realized through the transitivity system. There are six processes in the transitivity system, which are divided into material process, mental process, verbal process, relational process, behavioral process and existential process (Halliday&Matthiessen, 2004). Fairclough argues that the choice of the type of process that characterizes social reality reflects cultural, political or ideological significance (Fairclough, 1992: 180). Through the analysis of the transitivity of 2019 speeches, the frequency of

words expressing six different processes could be concluded. See Table 1.

Table 1. The Distribution of Six Processes

Process	Frequency	Numbers
Material	62%	29
Relational	13%	6
Mental	19%	9
Verbal	0%	0
Existential	0%	0
Behavioral	4%	2
Total	100%	46

From the table above, it can be seen that the material process accounts for the highest proportion in the speech, followed by the mental process, and then the relational process. Next part will focus on the analysis of the most used four processes: material process, relational process, mental process and behavior process.

(1) Material Process

Material process means that “the process of doing, happening, creating or changing”. (Halliday&Matthiessen, 2014:213-216). For instance, “Juny cooked a meal for her mother.” Here, the verb “cooked” indicates that this sentence is a material process. In other words, the word for material process refers to the process of doing something like cooking and the material process is completed through the verb to express the specific action process. In this speech, material process is the most used process in this speech, occurring 28 times and taking up 60% of the speech.

The original text :..., those who had formally been sworn enemies came together in friendly commemorations either side of the Channel,...

Version 1

那些以前不共戴天的敌人走到一起，以友好的方式进行纪念.....

Version 2

那些曾经是敌人的各方本着真正的和解精神，在英吉利海峡两岸举行友好纪念活动.....

In this example, one material process verb “came” describes the many soldiers from different countries who may have worked hand in hand in the past to maintain world peace with a sense of reconciliation. Meanwhile, “came” is respectively translated into Chinese like “走”, however, in Version 2, the translator choose to adopt the translation skill of omission, that means the corresponding words of “came” is rarely found in Chinese, leading to an unfaithful and unequally forceful translation.

Compared to Version 1, Version 2 is less faithful, this kind of translation strategy can make the target text less conform to the original text in terms of structure and semantics. As for Version1, the target text maintains the same material process as the original text.

The material process sentence in the original English text is still a material process sentence after translation. This is because the participants of the English material process is objective, it is not transferred by human will, so after the translation, it should also keep the participants and verbs consistent, only in this way can translators be faithful to the original text. That means, when translators translate the material process of action words, a simple description of a

fact is basically straightforward.

(2) Relational Process

Relational process is often used to describe the relationship, state and characteristics between people and things. It can be concluded that the frequency of relational process ranks third among all other processes.

The Queen uses the relational process to express her attitudes and opinions, and uses several tenses and relational clause to prove the fact that what she says is recognized by the people, not mixed with personal subjective factors, and to influence the ideology of the audience. Among the relational process clauses used by the Queen, six sentences are expressed by the copula be, accounting for 13%, all of which belong to the attributive clauses, and mostly simple present tense, in other words, all the relational process clauses in this paper belong to the attributive clauses in the simple present tense.

The original text: The path, of course, is not always smooth, and may at times this year have felt quite bumpy, but small steps can make a world of difference.

Version1

当然，道路不总是一帆风顺，虽然坎坷难料，但和谐与理解可以战胜分歧，前进的小小的步伐也能改变世界。

Version2

当然，这条道路并非总是一帆风顺，或许在今年时而感到非常坎坷，但是一小步一小步的积累，总能让世界变得不一样。

Version3

当然，路途并不总是那么顺利，今年也许有时会感到坎坷，但一小步就能改变世界。

In this example, she realizes the process of relations through “is”, indicating that the road to world peace and the elimination of differences among peoples is not always so smooth, especially in the bumpy year of 2019, which describes the current situation of the British people. She uses a small number of verbs that indicate the process of relationship and behavior, such as “is”, “am”, “was” etc., to make her speech emotional and gain public support. Here, “is” defined as a marker. The vehicle of the original text is “The path” with the attribute “not smooth”, the vehicle of the translation text is “道路” with the attribute “不是一帆风顺”. Thus, it can be concluded that the carrier and attribute of the translated text are the same as those of the original text. The translation is also a relational process sentence, which remains unchanged from the original in terms of materiality and semantics.

(3) Mental Process

In functional grammar, mental process means that the words expressing psychological process are used to express the process of psychological activities such as “seeing, feeling and thinking” (Halliday& Webster, 2014:20). It can be noted that mental process appears 9 times in this passage, which accounts for 19%. In the Queen’s speech, she expressed her feelings and good wishes to all the people. The verbs used in this speech are struck by, inspired by, know and so on:

The original text: The challenges many people face today may be different to those once faced by my generation, but I have been struck by how new generations have brought a similar sense of purpose to issues such as protecting our

environment and our climate.

Version1

现在，人们面临的挑战可能与我们那一代人面临的挑战不同，但令我惊讶的是，年轻一代在保护环境和气候等问题上表现出了强烈的使命感。

Version2

许多人今天面临的挑战可能与我这一代人当年所面临的不同，但是我对新一代人迎接挑战时的表现感到震撼，比如他们在保护环境和气候上表现出的与我们当年相似的“使命感”。

The original text: My family and I are also inspired by the men and women of our emergency services and armed forces...

Version1 同时，我和家人也深受我们国家紧急服务机构和武装部队的鼓舞。

Version2 我和我的家人也被仍在紧急服务和武装部队的工作人员们所感动

The perceiver of the clause of this psychological process is “I”, which uses the first person as the subject, indicating that the Queen’s surprise is from the heart and more sincere. The object of the original text is “new generation”. The verb “been struck by” shows that the author’s inner reaction is full of surprise, emphasizing the depth of surprise. This sentence uses the psychological process to express his gratitude to the younger generation and to thank the younger generation for their contribution to the country. Chinese translation is also a sentence of psychological process. The perceiver is “我”，“感到震撼”“令我惊讶”are words for the Queen to express her inner feelings. They belong to psychological process, and the translation of the environmental components behind them is also consistent. The participants of the translation correspond to the original text, and the emotional color of the expression is consistent with the original text.

The original text: ...and at Christmas we remember all those on duty at home and abroad, who are helping those in need and keeping us and our families safe and secure.

Version1

在圣诞节，我们记挂着那些在国内外坚守岗位的人们，他们帮助那些困难中的人们，保障我们和家人的安全。

Version2

在圣诞节这天，让我们铭记所有那些在国内外值守的人员，是他们正在帮助那些需要帮助的人，并确保我们和家人的安全。

In this sentence, the perceiver is “we”, and “we” contain the audience. Using “we”as the subject will make the audience participate in the situation and draw the audience to their own position. The verb “remember” expresses perception, indicating that remembering a phenomenon or fact, the object of perception is “all those on duty at home and abroad the road and those”, and the following clause specifies the specific person of perception.

In this sentence, the Queen skillfully uses the mental process to inspire, motivate the addressee, wishing to make the people cheerful, and thus winning the hearts of the audience and laying the foundation for the success of the speech. By this way, Chinese translation should also be a sentence of mental process, perception is “我们”，“记挂”和“铭记”are verbs of psychological process. The emotional

effect expressed in the translation is consistent with the original text. This sentence is in good agreement with the original text after translation, and there is no change. All the themes are “我们”，which can enhance the listeners’ sense of belonging.

(4) Verbal Process

The verbal process means that a person says something (Thompson, 2000:129). For example, She cried. Here, “cried” means the adoption of the verbal process. Since the proportion of verbal process is not large, it will be not discussed in detail.

(5) Existential Process

The process of existence refers to the objective description of the existence of someone or something, which only describes the state of existence without prediction or modification. In this article, there is no existence process, so it will not be analyzed here.

(6) Behavioral Process

Behavioral process means that the actor describes the movement of the body and action in the process of physiological activity. It can be seen from the table that behavioral process holds the distribution of 4%, appeared 2 times. Here are some examples,

The original text: As those historic were beamed back to Earth, millions of us sat transfixed to our television screens. As we watched Neil Armstrong taking a small step for man and a giant leap for mankind-and, indeed, for womankind.

Version1 当这些历史性的照片被传回地球时，我们数百万人呆呆地坐在电视机前，看着尼尔·阿姆斯特朗个人的一小步、人类的一大步——实际上，也是女性的一大步。这提醒我们所有人，巨大的飞跃往往始于一小步。

Version2 当这些具有历史意义的照片传回地球时，数以百万的民众一动不动守在电视机前，看着宇航员尼尔·阿姆斯特朗代表他们和她们，迈出个人的一小步，全人类的一大步。这提醒我们所有人，巨大的成就往往源自微小的积累。

Version3 当这些历史照片传回地球时，成千上万的人坐在电视屏幕上，看着尼尔·阿姆斯特朗为人类迈出了一小步，不管是男人还是女人，都迈出了巨大的飞跃。这提醒我们，不积跬步无以至千里。

The behavioral process is similar to the material process, and sometimes it is difficult to distinguish, but the biggest difference with the sentence of the material process is that the action contains the corresponding psychological activity. Participants generally have only one actor, and generally people, the rest is the environment, and add some psychological activities. Therefore, in translation, it is not only necessary to maintain the consistency of the action, but also to maintain the consistency of the psychological activity, and to distinguish the pure psychological process from the external physical characteristics it shows.

In the above example, “sat transfixed to ...watch” in the discourse is respectively translated into “呆呆地坐着...看”“一动不动地守着...看”“坐着...看”. In the source text, the phrase “sat transfixed to...watch” describes people’s behavior when they watched Amsterdam setting foot on the moon on television with excitement and convey the atmosphere of tension and excitement. In the example sentence, “sat transfixed to” is the most favorable confirmation of the progress of human cognition of space exploration and the

progress of human civilization. Thus, compared to Version 3, Version 1 and Version 2 can more accurately describe the psychological activities of the speaker when doing the behavior. If translated into Version 3, then the sentence should be classified as a material process rather than a behavioral process, not faithful to the original.

3.2. Reproduction of Interpersonal function in the translation of Political Speech

Interpersonal function refers to the situation in which the speaker expresses his attitude and judgment about some things, and tries to influence the listener's behavior and thoughts. The interpersonal function is mainly realized by the mood system (such as harsh/mild tone), modality system and personal pronouns. Next part will interpret the interpersonal meta-function in Christmas speech 2019.

(1) Translation of Mood

Under the framework of Halliday's Systemic Functional Grammar, interpersonal function is realized by mood, modality and person system.

The mood system is divided into the following four types: declarative, interrogative, imperative and exclamatory sentences (Zhuanglin Hu, Yongsheng Zhu, Delu Zhang, Zhanzi Li, 2025). In the Queen's Christmas speech, there are 46 clauses, all of which are declarative sentences.

Throughout all the translated versions of Queen Elizabeth II's Christmas speech in 2019, the tone types of all clauses are mostly retained in translation to realize the basic speech function of the original text and the interpersonal meaning equivalent to the original text. There are few cases in which declarative sentences are translated into interrogative sentences or exclamatory sentences.

(2) Translation of Modality

Modality refers to the fact that a sentence contains some components that indicate possibility. From the value of modality, Halliday believes that different values also reflect different modal changes. He divides modality into three values: high, medium and low. In this speech, she used 11 modal words which are listed in the table below.

Table 2. Distribution and Values of Modal Verbs

Modal verbs	Value	Numbers	Frequency
can	low	2	71.4%
Could		1	
May		2	
will	median	0	28.6%
would/wouldn't		2	
should/shouldn't		0	
must	high	0	0%
can't/couldn't		0	

There are three groups of modal verbs in this speech: first, low modal verbs like "can" "could" "may" appear most frequently, accounting for 71.4%; second, median modal verbs like "would/ wouldn't" occur twice, taking up 28.6%; third, high modal verbs like "must" do not appear in this address. These modal words represent the possibility of uncertainty. For instance,

The original text: But in time, through his teaching and by his example, Jesus Christ would show the world how small steps taken in faith and in hope can evolve long-held

differences and deep-seated divisions to bring harmony and understanding.

Version1

但随着时间的推移, 耶稣基督通过循循善诱向世界表明, 传播信仰和希望途中的一点一滴可以减少长期存在和根深蒂固的分歧, 从而带来和谐和理解。

Version2

但是随着时间的流逝, 耶稣将通过他的教导和榜样向世界展示, 在信仰和希望迈出的一小步可以克服长期而根深蒂固的分歧, 从而带来和谐与谅解。

By analyzing the context, it can be seen that the Queen wants to call on everyone to join hands to overcome difficulties by giving the example of Jesus. The belief that Jesus in this example affects human beings is a step-by-step thing that has not yet happened. It can be found that in the translation of the source text, the first group chose not to translate, and the second group chose to translate into "将". "would" has the following meanings in the Cambridge dictionary: 1) use to refer to future time from the point of view of the past "将, 将要 (从过去的角度指将来发生的事)" 2) used to refer to an intention from the point of view of the past "会 (从过去的角度指某一意图)". Therefore, it is more appropriate to choose the first meaning "将" in "would".

The original text: The path, of course, is not always smooth, and may at times this year have felt quite bumpy, but small steps can make a world of difference.

Version1

当然, 道路不总是一帆风顺, 虽然坎坷难料, 但和谐与理解可以战胜分歧, 前进的小小的步伐也能改变世界。

Version2

当然, 这条道路并非总是一帆风顺, 或许在今年时而感到非常坎坷, 但是一小步一小步的积累, 总能让世界变得不一样。

Version3

当然, 路途并不总是那么顺利, 今年也许有时会感到坎坷, 但一小步就能改变世界。

"May" has the following definitions in the Cambridge Dictionary: 1) use to express possibility "可能, 也许 (表示可能性)" 2) used to ask or give permission "可以 (用于请求许可或表示许可)" 3) used to introduce a wish or hope "祝, 愿 (表示祝愿或希望)". In this example, "may" indicates the uncertainty of the humanity's future, but it is always dangerous and changeable. Therefore, it is more appropriate to select the first definition "可能, 也许" of "may". Version 1 is more unfaithful to the original than the Version 2 and 3, which translates "may" into "难料".

In most cases, the translation of modal verbs is very flexible. The same English modal verbs can be translated according to different specific contexts, translators' different understandings and translators' comprehensive quality level.

3.3. Reproduction of Textual function in the translation of Public Speech

Textual analysis is an important research method in systemic functional linguistics. Different from ideational function and interpersonal function, it focuses on revealing the application of people's discourse in various contexts.

Textual function refers to the integrity, consistency and cohesion of discourse, which can make the language itself coherent and related to register. It mainly includes three subsystems: thematic structure, information structure and cohesion system (Zhuanglin Hu, Yongsheng Zhu, Delu Zhang, 1989:135). This part will focus on the textual function.

(1) Thematic Structure in translation

In Halliday's Systemic Functional Grammar, the theme-rheme structure consists of two parts: theme and rheme. The theme is the starting point of discourse information and the component that guides the development of small sentences in context. The rheme is the discourse that the speaker speaks from the theme, which is the core part of the discourse (Yan Zhang, Jian Zahng, 2020:104-109). Theme is the first component of the clause, while rheme refers to the rest of the clause. Halliday believes that theme includes topic.

My family and I(T1)are also inspired by the men and women(R1) of our emergency services and armed forces; and at Christmas we(T2) remember all those(R2) on duty at home and abroad, who are helping those in need and keeping us and our families safe and secure.(T1=T2)

Version1 同时,我和家人也深受我们国家紧急服务机构和武装部队的鼓舞。在圣诞节,我们记挂着那些在国内外坚守岗位的人们,他们帮助那些困难中的人们,保障我们和家人的安全。(T1=T2)

Version2 为紧急服务机构和军队服务的人们也让我和家人深受鼓舞。在圣诞节这天,让我们铭记所有那些在国内外值守的人员,是他们正在帮助那些需要帮助的人,并确保我们和家人的安全。(T1≠T2)

If the initial translation conforms to the idiomatic usage of the target language, we should try to maintain the same theme as the original text for translation, and cannot change it at will. Before translation, it is necessary to pay attention to the specific meaning of theme and rheme in the source language, otherwise it is easy to cause mistranslation and affect the understanding of the article by target language readers. In this case, two clauses are misunderstood due to Theme errors. Version 2 translate the second clause into the imperative sentence “让我们”. In fact, the first clause takes “my family and I” as the starting point of information, indicating that the current state of mind of the British royal family when they see the contributions made by the people. Similarly, the following consecutive clauses take “we” as the starting point of information. “We” refers to the same theme of the first sentence “my family and I”, and the two themes serve as a means of connecting two clauses. Although these two clauses have different rhemes, they both play a role in expressing gratitude to all the people who guard this country. The use of different rhyme conveys more information and adds flexibility to the sentences.

Correct translation of thematic progression patterns not only plays an important role in the coherence and cohesion of the target text, but also makes the text thematically focused and progressive.

(2) Cohesive System in translation

Cohesion refers to the coherence of a text through repetition and synonymy between words (Guowen Huang, 1988:16-18). The more coherent a speaker is, the easier it is for the reader to understand the content and the message the speaker is trying to convey. There are many types of cohesive modes: reference, ellipsis, grammar and vocabulary. Due to

the limited amount of text, this part focuses on vocabulary. Some of the most repeated expressions are listed in the following table. There are many examples of cohesion through repetition in the Queen's Speech. One of the original word repetitions is shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Illustration of Use of Repetition

Repetition	Times
anniversary	3
small step(s)	7
reconciliation	3
difference(s)	5
giant leap	3
peace	2

It can be concluded that small step(s) occurs 7 times, difference(s) 5 times, anniversary, reconciliation, giant leap 3 times while peace 2 times. These repeated words all have the effect of deepening the impression and serve to highlight the theme of the speech: she encourages people in the UK and around the world to shine a light of hope with love and kindness in the midst of difficulties. The use of Christmas throughout also highlights the Queen's emphasis on festive celebrations. For instance,

The original text:

1)...., Jesus Christ would show the world how **small steps** taken in faith and in hope can overcome long-held differences...

2)it's worth remembering that it is often the small steps, not the giant leaps, that bring about the most lasting change.

Version1

1).....耶稣基督通过循循善诱向世界表明,传播信仰和希望途中的一点一滴可以减少长期存在和根深蒂固的分歧.....

2)当我们都在期待崭新的十年时,需要记住的是,带来最持久变化的往往是一小步,而不是一大步。

Version2

1).....耶稣将通过他的教导和榜样向世界展示,在信仰和希望迈出的一小步可以克服长期而根深蒂固的分歧,从而带来和谐与谅解.....

2)而且,当我们都期待下一个10年时,我们要相信,最终能改变一切的,往往是我们的前进的这些一小步,而不是大的飞跃。

Small steps appeared 7 times in the full text. Based on Amsterdam's first step on the moon to open a new era in human history, it paves the way for the following appearance of small steps. In Version 1, “small steps” was separately translated to “一点一滴” and “一小步”; while in Version 2, “small steps” was consistently translated to “一小步”

From the perspective of discourse, English words repeated in a discourse are important information that is emphasized by the text, and therefore need to be consistent when translated into Chinese in order to convey the message and expression of the source language text. This consistent translation can be based on the principles of equivalence, repetition and maintaining the expression of the original text in translation theory, thus, Version 1 is less consistent to the original text compared to Version 2.

4. Conclusion

Based on Halliday's Systemic Functional Grammar, this study will analyze different translation examples of Queen Elizabeth II's Christmas speech in 2019. On the basis of fully grasping the development of the original text, the translator first reconstructs the textual meaning of the original text as much as possible without affecting the understanding of the target language readers according to the systematic nature of the source language, which proves the feasibility of the theory of systemic functional grammar in the translation of political texts, and further promotes the interdisciplinary research of linguistics and translation studies.

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