



# Translation Strategies Analysis of Metaphorical Words on Government Work Report Between 2020 and 2022 from the Perspective of Translation Rhetoric

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## Abstract

The Government Work Report, as one of the external propaganda texts, contains a wealth of characteristic cultural terms. Metaphorical words are such of the kinds, and their translation is of utmost importance. Therefore, based on the study of translation rhetoric, this article analyzes the translation strategies of metaphorical words and attempts to provide a new research perspective for the analysis of the Government Work Report. This article has selected 11 examples and found that the above-mentioned strategies are employed from which literal translation and paraphrase are frequently used. However, it merely focuses on the recent three years' government work report, and hence the selected examples of metaphorical words are limited. Examples of paraphrases are general, and mostly analyzed through free translation. There is still room for further study.

## Keywords

Government Work Report, characteristic cultural terms, metaphorical words, Translation Rhetoric, translation strategies

The Government Work Report serves as a form of external propaganda, containing rich cultural terms. Rather, those cultural terms embody the unique social and cultural significance of China. Therein, the translation of Chinese cultural terms involves the transformation and communication between two cultures. If translation strategies are chosen appropriately, they can not only achieve the basic purpose of communication but also enhance the international community's understanding of Chinese culture (cited from Wang Junli, Liu Yijun, & Liao Zhiqin, 2021). The connotation of cultural terms can be seen in "culture-specific items". Aixelá (1996) defined it as "certain items that appear in the text and have no corresponding items or have different textual statuses in the cultural system of the target language readers". Therefore, there are translation difficulties when the function and meaning of these items in the source text are transferred to the translation (cited from Wang Dongping, 2020). Therefore, the selection of translation strategies for cultural terms is crucial. Aixelá divides culture-specific items into proper nouns and general vocabulary. Wang Dongping (2020) further subdivides general vocabulary into abbreviations, idioms, allusions, and metaphorical words.

Based on Wang's classification, this paper aims to provide a new research perspective by analyzing the translation strategies of metaphorical words in the Government Work Report between 2020 and 2022, under the guidance of Translation Rhetoric Theory. To be more specific, the paper intends to employ literal translation, amplification-clarification, paraphrase, and shift of perspective to enrich further research.

## 1. Development Status

First, there is no consistent terminology for characteristic cultural words. Chinese characteristic cultural words carry special cultural significance in Chinese society. In terms of interpretation, the terms “culture-loaded words” (Nida, 1993), “culture-specific items” (Aixelá, 1996), and “Chinese characteristic words” (cited in Zhao Jing & Tian Xiaoqing, 2021) all have similar meanings. Scholars mainly focus on culture-loaded words and Chinese characteristic words.

Second, scholars have conducted studies from various perspectives, such as the classification of characteristic words, translation difficulties, translation strategies, and translation methods. In terms of classification, characteristic words include policy-related, ideological, and proverbial categories (Zhao Jing & Tian Xiaoqing, 2021); proper nouns, abbreviations, idioms, and allusions (Wang Dongping, 2020); Chinese characteristic words, numerical abbreviations, and four-character structures (Jiang Dan, 2014). As for translation difficulties, some scholars have focused on cultural differences, the application of abbreviations, and metaphorical expressions (He Qingxia, 2020). In terms of translation strategies, scholars have mainly studied domestication and foreignization. Some scholars have analyzed examples from a cultural perspective in the “Report of the 19th National Congress” and found that it adopts foreignization strategies while also using domestication strategies for supplementation and improvement (Cao Shengnan, 2018). Other scholars tend to favor domestication strategies, believing that the focus of translation strategies should be on the external promotion of political literature, as domestication strategies facilitate the dissemination of the country’s ideology in other countries (Liu Wei, 2015). In addition, translation methods include literal translation, free translation, word-for-word translation, part-of-speech conversion, and word addition (Huang Anna, 2021); transliteration, explanatory translation, and translation based on the original meaning (He Qingxia, 2020); literal translation with annotations and free translation (Chen Yawen, 2015).

These studies reflect that the classification criteria for characteristic words have not been standardized, leaving ample room for future research. The translation strategies for translating special words are generally similar: literal translation, free translation, conversion, and annotation. Up to now, no scholars have conducted specific research on the metaphorical words in the Government Work Report. Therefore, this paper, guided by the theory of Translation Rhetoric, intends to combine strategies such as direct presentation and amplification/explicitation to analyze the translation strategies of metaphorical words in the Government Work Report between 2020 and 2022, hoping to provide a new research perspective for subsequent studies.

## 2. Overview of Translation Rhetoric Theory

### 2.1 Connotation of Translation Rhetoric Theory

Translation Rhetoric, proposed by Professor Chen Xiaowei, is an emerging translation theory and a branch of translation research. It is briefly defined as interdisciplinary translation research that combines translation studies with rhetoric studies (Chen Xiaowei, 2022). Its core lies in exploring the rhetorical characteristics of translation behavior and the translation practice that reflects rhetorical awareness. Its research scope extends to all cross-linguistic and cross-cultural social interaction behaviors conducted through oral and written translation, in order to have a clearer understanding, interpretation, and resolution of theoretical and practical issues that are relevant to the development of the discipline and the concerns of the country (Chen Xiaowei, 2019).

### 2.2 Contents: translation audience; discourse of the translated text; context

Translation Rhetoric reconsiders the translation audience, discourse of the translated text, and the context, which have certain guiding significance for translation practice and translation analysis. The translation audience “has cross-linguistic, cross-cultural, and cross-national characteristics” (Chen Xiaowei, 2022, pp. 159-161). The discourse of the translated text pursues rationality and effectiveness. Rationality emphasizes the rational manifestation of surface forms, while effectiveness emphasizes the effective communication of deep content. The rhetorical context of translation refers to all rhetorical contextual factors related to translation behavior. These rhetorical contextual factors are related to translation needs or deficiencies (translation purposes/intentions/goals) that lead to the emergence of translation behavior; the target audience of the translation and the rhetorical limitations and constraints of all aspects of people, things, relationships, etc. (ditto, 2022, 198).

## 2.3 Rhetorical Translation Strategies

Translation rhetorical strategies involve the construction of translated discourse based on the rhetorical context of translation, the specific target audience, and relevant constraints, focusing on specific translation motivations. These strategies include literal translation/direct presentation, amplification/explicitation, deletion, paraphrase/situational appropriation, shift of perspective, equivalent translation, adaptation/creative translation, and rearrangement (ditto, 2022, 304).

## 3. Research on Metaphorical Word Translation Strategies in Translation Rhetoric

### 3.1 Literal Translation/Direct Presentation

Literal translation refers to a translation strategy that preserves both the content and form of the original text, reflecting fidelity. As one of the translation rhetorical strategies, it is also referred to as direct presentation. The use of this strategy can avoid misunderstandings or negative associations and ensure the potential effectiveness of the translated text for the readers (ditto, 2022, 305).

Example 1 “打虎” “take out tigers”

Example 2 “拍蝇” “swat flies”

Example 3 “毒瘤” “cancer”

These are professional terminology related to the anti-corruption campaign. “老虎” (tigers) metaphorically refers to corrupt officials in high positions, while “苍蝇” (flies) metaphorically refers to corrupt officials at the grassroots level. The translations “take out tigers” and “swat flies” only preserve the form and surface content of the original text, which is reasonable. However, the implied meaning is not conveyed, resulting in cultural loss and failure to convey effective meaning to the target readers. Yuan Zhuoxi (2020) approached it from a metaphorical perspective, using President Xi Jinping’s speech during his visit to the United States in Seattle as an example: “坚持老虎苍蝇一起打” (we have punished both “tigers” and “flies”, corrupt officials irrespective of ranking). He believes that these two metaphors convey the country’s determination to combat corrupt individuals. The method of literal translation with annotations effectively conveys the metaphorical connotations and rhetorical intentions. The literal translation with annotations method ensures the metaphorical connotation and rhetorical intention are well conveyed in the translation.

“毒瘤” has its original meaning of malignant tumor (cancer), later used as an analogy for dangerous things and people. The *Report* translates it literally as cancer, which magnifies the negative impacts of corruption directly and the necessity and urgency of anti-corruption campaigns.

Example 4 “黑天鹅” “灰犀牛”事件 “black swan” and “gray rhino” events

“黑天鹅” symbolizes events with small odds yet great influences. “灰犀牛” refers to the potential crisis with big odds and further influences. The term “灰犀牛” (gray rhino) emerged earliest in *The Gray Rhino: How to Recognize and Act on the Obvious Dangers We Ignore*, written by Michele Wucker, the John Simon Guggenheim Fellowship winner. The book was first published in 2016 and translated into Chinese in 2017. It can be seen that the *Work* employs literal translation because it works potentially for targeted readers.

Example 5 “相机调控” well-timed regulation

“相机调控” is a term used in the financial industry. It was first seen in the 2016 *Government Work Report*: “refers to targeted regulation and well-timed regulation based on interval regulation to respond to the increasing downward pressure on the economy.” This term appeared again in the 2021 *Government Work Report*. In fact, “相机调控” is borrowed from an English noun in economics, “camera choice”. It means making decisions flexibly and tactically based on different situations and opportunities, where “相” represents “opportunity”. Therefore, the translation “well-timed” vividly reflects the flexibility of policy regulation and effectively conveys the intended information.

### 3.2 Amplification/Explicitation

It refers to adding supplementary information while retaining the original expression. The purpose of this strategy is to reconcile the linguistic differences and cultural conflicts between the original text and the translation and increase readability (ditto, 305-306).

**Example 6 “蝇贪”**

“flies”, or corrupt low-ranking officials, whose misconduct directly affects people’s lives.

Flies are scary as they flood. “蝇贪”, a metaphor for extremely corrupt officials with low ranks, was mentioned in the Sixth Plenary Session of the 18th CPC Central Committee. The conference, held in 2016, focused on comprehensive and strict governance of the Party. Translation of “蝇贪” directly showcases the intensity of these people like “flies” and supplements “corrupt low-ranking officials, whose misconduct directly affects people’s lives” to further expound its content information for enhancing readability. Specifically, “misconduct” reveals the nature of corrupt behavior; “directly” deepens the great harm caused by those low-ranked officials. So, “flies” cannot be ignored and need to be cracked down on as soon as possible, for they have penetrated into people’s daily lives.

**Example 7 急转弯 sharp turns in policy**

急转弯 metaphorically refers to a sudden change in attitude or method (zag; turn sharply). Based on the rhetorical context in the report, it can be seen that “宏观政策” (macro policy) should not have 急转弯 (sharp turns). Therefore, the translation should supplement the important information of “policy” to achieve effective communication of the intended meaning.

**3.3 Paraphrase/Situational Appropriation**

As a translation rhetorical strategy, it refers to a strategy of explaining and clarifying due to temporary semantic and cultural conflicts caused by contextual synonyms, logic, non-core elements in the original text, or the need to eliminate some figurative expressions (ditto, 308).

**Example 8 放水养鱼 creates a more enabling environment**

放水养鱼 metaphorically means that in order to develop a certain cause, there must be investment and the creation of a favorable environment for its development. Its context entails its figurative meaning: in order to create a favorable development environment for enterprises (fish) and assist in the relief and development of market entities, the text conveys the message that “phase policies” and “institutional arrangements” promote the development of enterprises (market entities). In other words, these are favorable environments for the development of market entities. Taking this context into consideration, the translator translates “放水养鱼” as “create a more enabling environment” to convey effective information and highlight the positive role of policies.

**3.4 Shift of Perspective**

As a translation rhetorical strategy, the connotation of a shift of perspective is not limited to the need for the translator to reorganize the surface form of the source language information due to different expression habits and to transform the expression perspective to conform to the target language habits (ditto, 309). Its purpose is to enhance the impact of the translation on the audience and ensure its effectiveness.

**Example 9 摘帽**

be lifted from poverty (2021); be lifted out of poverty (2022)

摘帽 refers to all poverty-stricken counties being lifted out of poverty and removing the “poverty” label. The translator translates the original text “全国八百三十二个贫困县全部摘帽” as “A total of 832 impoverished counties have been lifted out of poverty”. The passive voice omitted in Chinese is restored in the English translation, where poverty-stricken counties have had the “poverty” label lifted. 摘帽 is translated as “be lifted out of poverty” to conform to target language habits (the passive voice) and facilitate understanding by readers of the translation.”

**Example 10 深水区 uncharted waters**

深水区 describes dangerous waters or is compared to critical periods. Its context is “We have comprehensively deepened reform with tremendous political courage. We have carried out critical tasks and enhanced top-level design for reform. We have dared to brave uncharted waters, take on tough problems...”, which implicates 深水区 as the opening and reforming-up. It is translated as uncharted waters. “uncharted” refers to fields that are unexplored, from which the superficial form has been changed with the deep content further learned.

**Example 11 不信邪、不怕鬼、不怕压**

we cannot be swayed by fallacies, deterred by intimidation, or cowed by pressure

The source text avoids being translated directly as “we don’t believe evils, be afraid of ghosts and pressures”.

Ghosts are viewed as scary images both at home and abroad. Furthermore, they are regarded as derogatory (Zhou Peijun, 2013). The literal translation can be readable for target readers, yet unable to convey effective information, for the context is “We must foster a firmer sense of purpose, fortitude, and self-belief in the whole Party and the Chinese people ...” By means of shift of perspective, the subjective initiative and determination can be effectively showcased through the passive voice. In addition, consistency between the original text and the translation can be increasingly strengthened, such as fallacies for 邪(evil), and intimidation for 鬼(ghost). In a sense, they witness the transformation from concrete things to abstract things and conform to “a firmer sense of purpose, fortitude, and self-belief” separately.

These examples reflect that the shift of perspective often works by taking the surface form into passive voice or abstraction from concretization, aiming at conveying deep information and enhancing understanding.

#### 4. Conclusion

This article analyzes the English translation strategies of metaphorical words in the Government Work Report from the perspective of translation rhetoric, hoping to provide a new perspective for future research. The author has collected the Government Work Report between 2020 and 2022 and found a total of 33 metaphorical words. Among them, the author selected 5 examples and found that they reflect different translation strategies such as literal translation, amplification-clarification, paraphrases, and shift of perspective from the perspective of translation rhetoric. However, the use of literal translation and paraphrase strategies is more common. However, there are still some shortcomings in this study: 1. The number of selected examples is a bit small, focusing only on the English translation of metaphorical words in the past three years from 2020 to 2022; 2. The examples that reflect the paraphrase strategy are relatively general, and mostly analyzed from the perspective of free translation. Subsequent research can start from this point and conduct further analysis.

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