

# A Study on the Translation of Chinese Political Discourse Metaphors from the Perspective of Eco-translatology —Taking the Report on the Work of the Government in 2022 as an Example

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Chinese political discourse is the embodiment of the will of the people, the will of the CPC and the will of China. Conceptual metaphor is closely related to political discourse. Taking the 2022 government work report as an example, this paper discusses the metaphor problems in political discourse, and analyzes the metaphorical expressions and their functions in political discourse. Based on this, eco-translatology is used to analyze the translation strategies of metaphors in political discourse to help Chinese political discourse get better publicity.

*Keywords:* eco-translatology, chinese political discourse, conceptual metaphor

## Introduction

China's political discourse reflects its politics, economy, culture, and diplomacy, and is key to explaining China's path and development. To successfully translate it into foreign languages, it is essential to understand the meanings and functions of metaphors in China's political discourse. Metaphor is a common phenomenon in language use and has long been regarded as a rhetorical device. In the development of linguistics, Lakoff and Johnson first proposed the conceptual theory of metaphor in their 1980 book *Metaphors We Live By*, opening up a new path for the cognitive study of metaphor. In 2004, Professor Hu Gensheng proposed a translator-centered translation concept in his book *Translation as Adaption and Selection*, pointing out that translators must selectively adapt to the translation environment and make adaptive choices to complete the "three-dimensional" translation. Eco-translatology is important for the translation of metaphors. However, research on the translation of metaphors in China's political discourse based on eco-translatology is still limited. Therefore, the author takes the translation of the 2022 Government Work Report as an example to discuss the translation strategy choices for metaphors in China's political discourse based on eco-translatology.

## **Research Background**

### **Eco-translatology**

The concept of eco-translatology was first proposed by Chinese Professor Hu Gensheng at the 3rd Asian Translators' Forum in 2001. Eco-translatology refers to the study of translation from an ecological perspective.

Hu Gengshen (2008) puts out that the theory emphasizes the ecological integrity of translation, offering new descriptions and interpretations of the nature, process, standards, principles, and methods of translation, and articulating translation phenomena from an ecological perspective. In summary, the nine research foci and theoretical perspectives of eco-translatology include: ecological paradigm, associative sequence, ecological rationality, purposeful translation, translational eco-environment, translator-centeredness, adaptation/selection, three-dimensional transformation, and post-hoc punishment (Hu, 2011). Eco-translatology has repeatedly positioned its theoretical “paradigm”, ultimately establishing the translator-centered model of “translation = adaptation + selection” (Hu, 2004). Compared with other translation theories, the research and application of eco-translatology are not yet saturated. As a translation theory proposed by Chinese translation scholars, it can provide more assistance and reference for the translation of China's political discourse, enabling it to go global more effectively. Therefore, this paper takes eco-translatology as the theoretical basis and interprets the translation of metaphors in China's political discourse from this perspective.

### **Conceptual Metaphor**

Traditionally, metaphor has been regarded as a rhetorical device, a linguistic application used to express certain meanings in literary works. It is commonly believed that metaphors have the following three characteristics: First, metaphors are a form of embellishment; second, metaphors are a linguistic expression rather than a concept; third, basic metaphor types share similarities. In the subsequent development of linguistics, attention to metaphors began to shift from the linguistic level. With the rise and development of cognitive linguistics since the 1970s, Lakoff and Johnson proposed the theory of conceptual metaphor from a cognitive linguistic perspective. They (1980) argued that metaphors are systematic mappings from a specific source domain to (usually abstract) target domains. The mapping between linguistic domains is the only way for the generation, transmission, and expression of human cognitive abilities and is also one of the most fundamental cognitive mechanisms for our conceptualization of the real world. The expression of conceptual metaphors is somewhat systematic. Coherent thinking formed by different languages constitutes the basis for communication and thought and also forms the structure of corresponding source and target domains. Conceptual metaphors are a process of transforming knowledge from one conceptual domain (source) to another related conceptual domain (target) through cognitive correspondence (Gong, 2017).

In short, the metaphorical process is a cross-domain mapping process that leverages the experience of another similar thing to understand the current thing. There are three types of metaphors: ontological metaphors, orientational metaphors, and structural metaphors. Ontological metaphors abstract concrete things from the source domain and project them into the abstract target domain. Orientational metaphors map abstract concepts from different cultural bases onto orientational concepts, making concepts spatial. Structural metaphors use structured concepts to construct another concept.

Although politics is a part of people's lives, political discourse often involves abstract content that is distant from daily life. Therefore, metaphors are commonly used in political discourse. Thus, correctly analyzing and interpreting metaphors in political discourse is crucial to lay the foundation for further international publicity translation.

## **Analysis of Metaphors Translation Strategies in 2022 Government Work Report**

### **Metaphors in the 2022 Government Work Report**

The author selected the 2022 Government Work Report as the corpus, extracted metaphorical keywords, and categorized their sources into metaphors of travel, war, machine, plant, architectural, container and object.

Travel metaphors are a type of structural metaphor. Travel refers to the journey from a starting point to a destination, with various ups and downs along the way. Only by holding firm beliefs and persevering can one reach the end. Travel metaphors are commonly used in political discourse to project this source domain onto national development. In the development and construction of a country, the CPC serves as the guide and compass, the people are the followers led by it, and national development policies and strategies are the path beneath the people's feet. Travel metaphor keywords extracted from the 2022 Government Work Report include words such as “新步伐” and “行稳致远”.

War metaphors are a type of structural metaphor. War metaphors analogize this state of struggle and confrontation to non-war domains. In the process of battle, unity, perseverance, and morale are crucial factors that can influence the outcome of war. In the political realm, war metaphors usually refer to various factors and elements that contradict national development. War metaphor keywords extracted from the 2022 Government Work Report include the words such as “脱贫攻坚战” and “共克时艰”.

Machine metaphors belong to structural metaphor. The operation of a country's society is like a machine, requiring coordinated and orderly functioning of different departments. Only with clear division of labor and mutual cooperation can social stability and harmony be achieved. Machine metaphor keywords extracted from the 2022 Government Work Report include the words such as “激发” and “运行”.

Plant metaphors belong to structural metaphor. The process of plant growth from sowing seeds to bearing fruit is a slow, gradual accumulation. It requires careful watering and appropriate sunlight. Using the growth process of plants to analogize national development allows people to have a vivid understanding of the progress, achievements, or setbacks a country has made at a certain stage. Plant metaphor keywords extracted from the 2022 Government Work Report include the words such as “成果” and “丰硕”.

Architectural metaphors are a type of structural metaphor. Construction begins with laying the foundation, and then gradually builds upward. The process of building a high-rise from a foundation requires the relentless effort of construction workers, demanding caution, meticulousness, and patience. Architectural metaphors are commonly used in political discourse to analogize the construction of various national endeavors, where different departments and people work tirelessly under the leadership of the Party. Architectural metaphor keywords extracted from the 2022 Government Work Report include words such as “建筑” and “支持”.

Container metaphors are a type of ontological metaphor. The source domain is viewed as a tangible container, and abstract ideas or behaviors are analogized to containers, making them more concrete and tangible. Container metaphors help people visualize abstract concepts. Political discourse often involves

abstract or non-daily concepts, and container metaphors are frequently used. Container metaphor keywords extracted from the 2022 Government Work Report include words such as “人类命运共同体” and “深入”.

Object metaphors are a type of ontological metaphor. In political texts, everyday objects are often used as metaphors for abstract political concepts to help people understand political discourse. Object metaphor keywords extracted from the 2022 Government Work Report include words such as “米袋子” and “菜篮子”.

### **Translation Strategies for Metaphors Based on Eco-translatology**

This section analyzes whether eco-translatology can guide the translation of metaphors in the 2022 Government Work Report and, if so, how it provides guidance, based on the “three-dimensional” transformation principle of eco-translatology.

#### ***Linguistic Dimension***

The linguistic dimension refers to the translator’s adaptive choices based on linguistic differences, occurring at various stages and levels.

##### Example (1)

ST: 脱贫攻坚战

TT1: poverty alleviation

TT2: battle against poverty

The word “战” is a war metaphor. This term describes China’s relentless efforts in leading its people to eradicate poverty and reflects the arduous nature of this task. The verbs “脱” and “攻” modify the action of eliminating poverty. Given the linguistic differences between Chinese (a dynamic language) and English (a static language), there are two recommended approaches to translate. In TT1, the nominalization of the verb “战” can make the translation concise and clear. In TT2, the word “战” is directly translated as “battle” and the verb “脱” and “攻” are replaced by the preposition “against”, thus highlighting the arduousness of the task and the determination to complete it.

##### Example (2)

ST: 向中高端产业迈进

TT1: manufacturing toward the medium and high-end industry

TT2: in the march toward the medium and high-end industry

The word “迈进” belongs to container metaphor. This metaphor conveys the abstract concept of industrial development by likening it to a tangible process, emphasizing the dynamic nature of progress. Two versions of translation are recommended. In TT1, we can use the direct translation by translating keyword “迈进” into “manufacturing toward”, thus better emphasizing the trend and direction of development. In TT2, the word “迈进” is translated into a noun “march”, which can also show the direction of the development, but the strength of the development is not as strong as what has been shown in TT1.

##### Example (3)

ST: 激发市场活力和社会创造力

TT: boost market dynamism and social creativity

The word “激发” belongs to machine metaphor. It portrays market dynamism and social creativity as essential drivers of social development, evoking the idea that these elements are crucial for societal operation.

While “boost” is a direct translation, it is more appropriate in this context than “stimulate”, which implies a more direct “stimulus”. “Boost” better conveys the idea of promoting the development of these two drivers of social progress.

### ***Cultural Dimension***

In the translation process, the translator must convey the cultural connotations of the text, avoiding misinterpretations from a cultural perspective and ensuring that the translation fits within the broader cultural system of the source language.

Example (4)

ST: “米袋子” and “菜篮子”

TT: “rice bag” and “vegetable basket”

The words “米袋子” and “菜篮子” belong to object metaphor. These everyday objects symbolize the basic needs of the people. These terms are culturally specific to China and evoke images of farmers’ markets. Given cultural differences, these objects may not be familiar to foreign readers. A direct translation is used here because these terms are not abstract and can be easily understood. Retaining these culturally specific terms in translations can demonstrate Chinese strength and voice. This shows that when cultural differences exist, translation does not always have to cater to the target language audience. Instead, the choice of translation can reflect the translator’s stance and the strength of the source language.

### ***Communicative Dimension***

Translators must adapt to the communicative intentions of bilingual interaction, ensuring that the translation not only conveys information but also fulfills its communicative function.

Example (5)

ST: 爬坡过坎

TT: keep pushing to overcome risks and challenges

The phrase “爬坡过坎” belongs to travel metaphor. This phrase describes overcoming difficulties and obstacles in a journey, symbolizing the challenges and risks faced in national development. It emphasizes the need to surmount these challenges for better progress. A free translation is used here to directly convey the metaphor’s meaning, ensuring coherence and facilitating the spread of Chinese political discourse.

## **Conclusion**

The following findings were made through this study:

First, there is no one-size-fits-all translation strategy for metaphors in Chinese political discourse. Even metaphors originating from the same source domain do not have a uniform translation method. By considering the context and comparing different approaches, a better translation can be achieved. Therefore, eco-translatology provides valuable guidance for translating metaphors in Chinese political discourse. This is a relatively new research area with ample room for further exploration.

Second, although five translation methods for metaphors were discussed above, in practical analysis, the author finds that literal translation, free translation, and paraphrasing are used more frequently. Specifically, for many verbs expressing metaphors in Chinese political discourse, literal and free translations are employed most

often. For four-character phrases, paraphrasing tends to be used more frequently. For terms with Chinese characteristics, context-specific analysis is essential.

Lastly, in the practical process, the author has deeply felt that translation is a combination of adaptation and selection, which explains why even different metaphors from the same source domain do not have a fixed translation strategy. Admittedly, the sample of materials analyzed in this paper is not sufficient, and there is room for improvement and enhancement.

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