

# Research on English Translation Strategies of Characteristic Terms in the Public Diplomacy Discourse System: A Case Study of Relevant Terms from Decent Friendship Wins True Respect: Shanghai Public Diplomacy Practice

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**Abstract:** Public diplomacy constitutes a significant category within international relations studies, and its discourse system encompasses numerous political terms and cultural concepts with distinctive Chinese characteristics. This paper examines the English translation practices of core terms such as “people-to-people exchanges,” “strategic competition,” “soft power,” and “sharp power” by analyzing the text Decent Friendship Wins True Respect: Shanghai Public Diplomacy Practice. The study reveals significant challenges in translating public diplomacy terminology, including high political sensitivity, complex cultural connotations, and differences in international discourse systems. Guided by functional equivalence theory and terminology principles, this paper proposes translation strategies that integrate elements of domestication and foreignization. These approaches aim to provide reference points for disseminating public diplomacy discourse internationally, thereby enhancing the recognition of China’s distinctive diplomatic discourse system on the global stage.

**Keywords:** Public Diplomacy Terminology, People-to-People Exchanges, Terminology Translation; Domestication; Foreignization; Cross-Cultural Communication.

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## Introduction

With the international situation changing radically and the competitiveness in the international discourse increasing every day, the language of public diplomacy with Chinese characteristics has turned into a kind of cultural and political overtones, and also the component of intercultural interaction (Liu, Wei, 2015). Accuracy, consistency, and appropriateness of the translation of terminology will not just affect the accuracy with which the message of diplomatic information will be conveyed but will also be related to the international discourse power and influence of China. It is therefore important to note that analyzing the tendencies and approaches in English translation of the terminology of public diplomacy with the help of specific texts is significant to both theory and practice.

Since the international status of China is growing, the role of people diplomacy has been more important than ever in shaping the national image, speaking on behalf of China and promoting the international consciousness. President Xi Jinping had previously stated that it was very essential to tell China stories well and disseminate the voice of China well. One of the aspects to consider in order to achieve this goal is the correct understanding of the words used in the field of public diplomacy. The terms constitute the knowledge system of a discipline and the quality of the translation of the terms themselves will determine the outcome of the international dissemination of disciplinary knowledge (Zhao, 1992).

The saying also has its origins in the Analects of Confucius and is an ancient statement that implies the necessity of being capable of interacting with other people well and earning their admiration after several years of communication. It fits well within

the modern concept of public diplomacy, which promotes the idea of linking the peoples together, as well as exchanging the information among civilizations. There are numerous professional terms in the book: Decent Friendship Wins True Respect: Shanghai Public Diplomacy Practice, e.g., 人文交流 (people-to-people exchanges), 战略竞争 (strategic competition), 软实力 (soft power), and 锐实力 (sharp power). These terms have a high research value when translated into English.

It is theoretically possible that the terminology translation in the field of public diplomacy falls within the scope of the interdisciplinary domain of studying terminology and translation. The current study will improve the theoretical background of Chinese-characteristic political terminology translation and provide the fresh perspectives on the issue. Careful analysis of the application of public diplomacy terminology translation might reveal some particular set of rules and fundamental principles of political terminology translation and help to develop terminological translation theory innovatively (Zhao, 1992). This paper can make a contribution to the practical implementation of the strategy of managing the translation of texts of the public diplomacy in terms of its practical use, which is likely to improve the quality of the translated texts and their effectiveness in dissemination. The translation strategies and techniques suggested in this paper may serve as an instruction to the translators allowing them to address various challenges that arise during the translating process of the public diplomacy terminology. The concept of socialization also implies an effective translation of terminology that enables the rest of the world to understand the diplomatic philosophy and the future direction of China in development and



promotes the interaction of people and a sense of respect among the different cultures.

### **Conceptual System and Classification of Public Diplomacy Terminology**

The concept of public diplomacy is a special vocabulary with its specific meanings within the field of public diplomacy. Terminology studies require that terms should have three main properties, namely, monosemy, systematicity, and standardization (Zhao, 1992). However, due to their disciplinarity aspect, the public diplomacy terminology tends to comprise instances of highly sensitive political context, complex cultural overtones, and significant differences between the international discourse systems, which makes the translation of terminology a difficult endeavor.

When it comes to terminology research, the notion of public diplomacy is a member of the social science terminology system and has certain attributes that may be identified relative to the natural science terminology. While natural science terminology usually has precise definitions and clear cut limits of use, the public diplomacy terminology may contain a value judgement and an ideological element, and its interpretation may vary depending on context and perspective. Therefore, in implementing their translation work, the translator must do more than just translating the meaning of the terminology, but rather consider the political implication and cultural background of the terminology as well (Liu, 2020).

The current paper breaks down the public diplomacy terminology in four categories. The first category is the diplomatic mechanism terminology that is made up of: China-U.S. High-Level Consultation on People-to-People Exchange, China-Russia Cultural Cooperation Committee, and China-EU High-Level People-to-People Dialogue Mechanism. These are terms related to the actual mechanisms and platforms of cross-border interaction. To translate this type of terminology, it is essential to understand its institutional nature and its functional purpose and address it using phrases that are consistent with the standards of the international context.

Also, the language of the strategic concept, including but not limited to, strategic competition, strategic engagement, soft power, and sharp power, is a reflection of the strategic thought and theories applied in the field of international relations. All these concepts are rooted in the western tradition of international relations theory so that one should be aware of their theoretical origins and academic background during translation. The third is the organizational institution terminology, namely the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), State Council Information Office, Shanghai Institutes of International Studies. In the context of this particular terminology, it is required to use official designated translations, or those adopted internationally as the first step.

Lastly, the expression of culture activities such as ping pong diplomacy (or the Beijing-Tokyo Conference), the China-Japan-Korea Conference. These terms have a history of specific practices in the area of public diplomacy and are often very cultural in nature. It is important to note when translating that the cultural transmission of information and its acceptability to the user of the target language should also be considered. This classification will provide an understanding of the heterogeneous nature of the terminology of public diplomacy and point to the appropriate ways of translation according to the specified types.

### **Linguistic Characteristics of Public Diplomacy Terminology**

Public diplomacy language often touches on sensitive issues such as national sovereignty and ideology, and the political factors must be considered fully during translation. Sharp power is a term that originates in the Western discourse system and has distinct negative implications. One must know what the political significance is and where it stands in the discourse in order to translate it accurately. Political sensitivity may also manifest in choosing certain terminology positions. A particular concept may have different expressions within different discourse systems and it is important that translators select appropriate expressions as per their translation goals and intended audience in order to avoid ambiguity or misinterpretation.

The idea of political sensitivity in terms of terminology translation refers to ensuring that translators remain aware of the ideological connotations that come with terms. To illustrate this point, in the process of translating terms related to the diplomatic work of China, translators must ensure that the translated versions in English accurately reflect the philosophy of peace development in China and at the same time do not pose difficulties to the international community. The ability to strike such a delicate balance between loyalty to a source text and awareness of a target audience is an embodiment of the political component of the public diplomacy terminology translation. With the application of appropriate strategies by the translator, it is feasible to create conditions where terminology would not just express the initial meaning, but be sounding natural to the target audience.

Most of the terms in the field of public diplomacy have deep roots in Chinese cultural backgrounds. The concept of 善与人交, 久而敬之 may be translated in English as Decent Friendship Wins True Respect which not only reflects the meaning of the source text but also reflects the values of the Chinese culture. The cultural implications are also present in metaphorical characteristics of terminology. Public diplomacy terminology regularly uses metaphors as expressions of ideas, and during the process of translation, it is necessary to properly comprehend what metaphors mean and to identify appropriate equivalents in the target language (Li, 2007).

Culturally loaded terms present particular difficulties in translation. To exemplify, translations of the classical Chinese literature or the philosophical concepts are only possible with a great degree of cultural knowledge to render these words into the English language. The cultural content of the translation must be there but it has to be made comprehensible to individuals who have not come across the Chinese culture. It can also be done through explanatory additions or selective use of culturally similar expressions. The differences highlighted above highlight the necessity of adjusting the techniques used in the translation so that they would conform to the linguistic and cultural norms.

The notion of the public diplomacy has a variety of forms. Regarding the phrase, 人文交流, there are two equivalent phrases in English namely cultural exchange and people-to-people exchanges (Liu, 2020). Such choices in different contexts require the translators to remain aware of the context. The reasons behind the variation in the terminology are manifold: firstly, the terminology is being developed and changed and does not have uniform standards; secondly, the contexts may be diverse in their utilization of the terminology; and lastly, when it comes to other

translators, they might have different opinions and preferences regarding the same terminology.

There are many abbreviations used in the area of public diplomacy (FBI, GDP, PPP, and COP27). The given abbreviations can be polysemous. E.g., PPP can also stand for both the public-private partnership and purchasing power parity. This should be distinguished accurately when translating based on the context. When translating an abbreviation it is necessary to consider the level of understanding of the target audience. It is suggested that in dealing with high-level profession-oriented abbreviations they should be explained in full in their first occurrence so that the reader can understand them and effectively communicate.

### **English Translation Strategies for Public Diplomacy Terminology**

The process of translating terminology into the field of public diplomacy requires an English language approach because it may be viewed as a challenge as it demands theoretical guidance and practical application. The primary goal is to ensure that terminologies are appropriately passed across cultural boundaries and have their meanings well accepted by the target audiences. Following the idea of the functional equivalence theory, principles of terminology, and linguistic characteristics of the terminology of public diplomacy, this chapter proposes a systematic model of translation processes that provide translators with specific directions to follow when implementing them (Wang, 2002).

The domestication approach to translation focuses on the reader of the target language, whereby the translation can only conform to the expression system and discourse of the target language. In the sphere of public diplomacy translation, the domestication strategy can be found in these areas. First, application of recognized translations at an international level. E.g., 中美人文交流高层磋商 may be translated into English as China-U.S. High-Level Consultation on People-to-People Exchange. The translation follows the international conventions and conveys the intended information clearly and it is comprehensible to the international community.

The second point is based on the rules of the discourse of the target language. For instance, the expression 战略竞争 needs to be written as strategic competition, not necessarily literally because this translation has long been accepted as a popular term among the international academic community. Following the discourse rules of the target language helps translations gain access to the international discourse system. Third, it is important that the translation fits into the cultural context of the language that is the target. The word 软实力 may be rendered as soft power, which will make it easier for foreign readers to comprehend that notion. This type of translation utilizes the existing conceptualization in the target language and reduces the cognitive effort required by the readers.

The foreignization strategy of translating aims to preserve cultural features of the source language to have an exclusive exotic flavor in the translation (Wang, 2002). In the context of the terminology of translation into the area of public diplomacy, the strategy is formulated in such a manner. To begin with, the preservation of the vocabulary that is imbued with the essence of the Chinese culture. One instance is the translation of 小球转动大球 as ping-pong diplomacy, which preserves the Chinese nature of the game of ping-pong and uses the term diplomacy to indicate its diplomatic character. This type of translation might serve the

purpose of expressing a terminological meaning and simultaneously preserving Chinese cultural features.

The other alternative is to apply transliteration with annotations. There are situations where a specific Chinese word cannot be expressed in the target language and transliteration with annotation can be the answer. This helps to preserve the characteristics of the source language as well as makes it possible to understand the meaning of the terminology by the reader of the target language. The third method is a literal translation. In case the terminology is closely associated with the culture of China, the literal translation can be used to preserve the cultural imagery. When dealing with culturally-specific objects without any equivalents in the target language, literal translations are a good option because they preserve the culture and make them readable.

Elimination translation strategy implies that it is necessary to simplify the original text in a proper way without altering the information transmitted through the translation and therefore making the translation concise and efficient. The omission approach in terms of translation in reference to public diplomacy can be identified in many ways. Firstly, elimination of redundant information, such as reducing the phrase of domestic gross product (GDP) to GDP when it appears in context since it is repetitive. This approach will make the translation simpler and less ambiguous and more efficient in the reading process.

Cross-domain applicability suggests that translators have to select the most appropriate translation based on specific circumstances (Zhang and Wang, 2007). Taking the concept of people-to-people exchanges as an example, it could be translated into the sphere of international relations as people-to-people exchanges, into the sphere of culture as cultural exchange, and into the sphere of education as educational exchange. It is also worth noting that the concept of cross-domain applicability needs to be concentrated on the disciplinarity of terminology. The term terminology may not necessarily mean the same thing or be applied in the same way across disciplines, so it should be capable of understanding the disciplinarity of terminology.

### **Case Analysis of Public Diplomacy Terminology Translation**

The process of translation of the terminologies to use in carrying out public diplomacy should follow the functional equivalence theory, terminology principles as well as the domestication and foreignization methods mentioned above but must also be enriched with the linguistic properties of political sensitivity, cultural implication, and terminological diversity. In the next section, three key terms: people-to-people exchanges, sharp power, and strategic competition will be selected to analyze their logic of translation into English language in accordance with theoretical appropriateness.

Humanistic communication is an important theme in the field of public diplomacy that can be viewed through the prism of diplomatic mechanisms as well as cultural activities. The semantic boundaries of humanistic communication are very diverse in terms of their linguistic diversity, which depends on the context and covers a wide range of cross-domain situations including international relations, culture, and education. Therefore, it needs to be translated according to the idea behind the functional equivalence theory considering the principles related to contextual appropriateness and the elements of cross-domain applicability (Li, 2007).

**Source text:** “人文交流是公共外交的重要组成部分。随着公共外交的深入，人文交流的概念、机制也日渐丰富。中国官方早在北京奥运会结束后便正式提出“人文外交”概念。尽管在具体实践中的具体名称可能因对象而存在差异，如中美人文交流高层磋商、中俄人文合作委员会、中欧高级别人文交流对话机制等”

**Translation:** “Cultural exchange represents a vital component of public diplomacy. As public diplomacy has evolved, the concept and mechanisms of people-to-people exchanges have grown increasingly sophisticated. The Chinese government formally introduced the notion of people-to-people exchanges shortly after the Beijing Olympics. In practice, the specific terminology may vary depending on the counterpart, for instance, the Sino-U.S. High-Level Consultation on People-to-People Exchanges, the Sino-Russian Cultural Cooperation Committee, and the China-EU High-Level People-to-People Dialogue.”

In vocabulary, the meaning of the phrase 人文交流 can be described in two aspects: the cultural aspect is the cultural transmission and mutual learning between different civilizations; and people aspect is the relation and interaction between unofficial groups of people. Such semantic duality results in the lack of uniformity of the English translation. The translations of the phrase as a cultural exchange and people-to-people exchanges are also compatible with the practical aspects of contextual adaptation principles.

When the text is devoted to the cultural aspects of “人文交流”, cultural exchange is referred because it can be extended to the entire methods of translation within the cultural domain, and it can be equivalently functional in terms of the culture. When speaking about the official lines of communication between countries, there are people-to-people interactions. The choice is made according to the traditions of international relations regarding the idea of people-to-people exchanges (domestication strategy) and it is appropriately stated that humanistic exchange as a mechanism of diplomacy has the additional benefit of characterizing it as an opposite to the formal bilateral discussions. This is one of the examples of how the same Chinese term can mean various things in English, depending on the context, and illustrates the importance of functional equivalence in providing effective cross-cultural communication.

The notion of 锐实力 is a Western discourse and has strong political sensitivity and ideological bias characteristics as a strategic concept. The semantics are not just literal but can also mean the negative prediction of the diplomatic work of other states, which may be referred to as position-laden discourse marks. The translation of this terminology must be done so that it is accurate, acceptable, and context-specific.

**Source text:** “其战略基础随美国单方面启动中美战略竞争而恶化，其社会基础则由于“锐实力”概念的提出而遭到毒化。”

**Translation:** “Its strategic foundation has weakened due to the unilateral initiation of strategic competition by the U.S., while its social foundation has been undermined by the introduction of the concept of ‘sharp power.’”

Concerning the linguistic characteristics, the core issue of sharp power is its political sensitivity as well as the gap between the international discourse system. It is often utilized in the

Western world to deprecate the efforts made by China towards enhancing its presence in the world, which are clearly negative. However, the author of the current Chinese text aims at not criticizing but being objective and writing about the fact that this concept had the negative impact on the social foundation of relations between China and the USA and indirectly touches upon the biases that lie in the very term.

The translation is done in accordance with the foreignization method, namely, literal translation and quotation marks, which is more suitable in terms of the contextual requirements noted above. First of all, sharp power can be translated literally since it is fully compliant with the principle that the translation of terminology should be precise and reflect the essence of the terminology entirely without causing semantic errors as a result of free translation. Secondly, the quotation mark preservation possesses a great practical importance. First, it demonstrates the fact that the wording is a specific discourse environment (with a Western origin and positional coloring), and, second, it indicates to the target language readers the silent implication that this is a controversial idea in a certain circumstances, which makes the profound semantic and pragmatic impacts uniform as it is stated by the theory of functional equivalence.

Strategic competition is one of the key strategic ideas, which explains China-U.S. relations and has been built on Western international relations theory. Their meanings have different disciplinary associations and contextual limitations, i.e., they refer to a long-term and overall competition between countries on the strategic level rather than competing in the conventional sense. In order to do this terminology translation, there should be applied the rules of systematic and standardized terminology studies, and the strategy of domestication should be stressed.

**Source text:** “尽管如此，唯有到了特朗普政府时期，全面启动中美战略竞争才真正得以落实，战略接触被全面放弃。而拜登政府上台后，很大程度上接受了特朗普政府的战略假设，并使中美战略竞争变得更加系统、更加灵活”

**Translation:** “The Trump administration then fully implemented comprehensive strategic competition, abandoning strategic engagement. The Biden administration has largely maintained the strategic premises established by its predecessor, rendering Sino-U.S. strategic competition more systematic and adaptable.”

When it comes to flexibility of translation approach, the concept of translation strategy competition is a typical instance of application of the domestication strategy. It is a part of the common lexicon of the Western academia of international relations and official documents of governments to refer to strategic rivalry between states. Other important documents such as the U.S. National Security Strategy Report use the same wording because it conforms to the principle of following the discourse norms of the target language, which enables target language readers to grasp the meaning of the terminology without linguistic obstacles caused by exotic translations.

Besides, strategic contact is translated into English as strategic engagement that makes a semantic comparison with the term strategic competition. Their correspondence can be explained by the systemic features of the terminology systems that provide logical consistency between similar terminology translations in the same context. Similar use of the modifier strategic ensures the preservation of terminological coherence and enables clear

distinction between different diplomatic strategies. This example shows how effective the domestication strategy can be when it comes to the transmission of complex diplomatic concepts without violating the terminology systematicity.

## Conclusion

Translation of the language applied in public diplomacy is a complex type of intercultural communication that engages different aspects like linguistics, translation studies, and international relations. The current paper selects as research objects the terminology derived in *Decent Friendship Wins True Respect: Shanghai Public Diplomacy Practice* and investigates the linguistic characteristics of these terms of public diplomacy terminology and the corresponding English translation methods of these terms.

Based on the study, the translation of the terms employed in the concept of public diplomacy should be founded upon the principles of accuracy, standardization, broad recognition, and the appropriateness of the given context (Liu and Wei, 2015). Translators will also need to apply translation methods including domestication, foreignization, and omission with skill so that successful communication of diplomatic speech with Chinese characteristics can be communicated to the rest of the world. The analysis of the notions of people-to-people exchange, sharp power, and strategic competition indicates that the respective approaches are to be applied depending on the specific properties of each of the terms and its situational requirements.

This study has strong implication to practice and theory of translation. The proposed framework will provide useful guidance on how to handle the problem of translating the language of public diplomacy to the practitioners. To the theorists this combination of functional equivalence theory and terminology principles could be applied as a successful analytical instrument to explain the choices to translate under politically sensitive circumstances. The next

round of studies can be extended to other corpora and apply corpus methods to examine the data more broadly with the objective of exploring the laws and tendencies of the terminology translation of public diplomacy in greater detail. With the current developments in the sphere of artificial intelligence, one should also think about the future potentialities of what machine translation might be like in terminology translation, which could potentially make the process of terminology translation more efficient and better quality.

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