

A comparative study of bilingual writing and translation with reference to a bilingual article and a bilingual speech by two principal officials in the Hong Kong SAR government

This paper explores the stylistic differences between bilingual writing and translation in regard to government publications. The bilingual article titled “*Trade-offs are needed to solve Hong Kong’s housing problems*” studied in class and the speech for the Debate on the Motion of Thanks to the Chief Executive’s Policy Address are selected for investigation. Five aspects are addressed in the comparison, namely, the presentation order, choice of words, discrepancy in content, tone and reception, with examples provided for illustration.

1. Background information of the chosen texts

To prepare for an in-depth analysis of stylistic features, it is necessary to have basic understanding of the selected texts. The bilingual article on the housing issue was written by Anthony Cheung, the Secretary for Transport and Housing, and published in English and Chinese, respectively, in *South China Morning Post* on 17th December 2014 and *Hong Kong Economic Journal* on 18th December 2014. The largely Chinese speech with a faithful English translation, on the other hand, was given by Carrie Lam, Chief Secretary for Administration, at a Legislative Council meeting on 18th February 2016 for the Debate on the Motion of Thanks to the Chief Executive’s Policy Address. Regarding their target readers, the newspaper article was aimed at the general public, whereas the speech was directed mainly at members of the Legislative Council, but also the community at large.

2. Differences in presentation order

A close examination of the above materials reveals that the author of bilingual articles has more licence in deciding the presentation order than the translator. While

there is a rearrangement of paragraphs in Cheung's articles, the order of the English paragraphs in Lam's speech strictly follows that in the Chinese. In the latter part of his text, Cheung mentions some proposals by the public to tackle the housing problems. These are “實施租金管制”, followed by “興建「過渡性房屋」” and “取締所有劏房”, each suggestion in a single paragraph. However, when it comes to the English version, the order of paragraphs becomes “building ‘transitional housing’”- “eradicating illegal subdivided units”- “introducing rent control measures”. In other words, the introduction of rent control measures, which is the first suggestion in Chinese, is mentioned in the third paragraph in the English. Divergence in this presentation order can be attributed to the fact that Chinese readers who are more likely to be the common folk are more concerned with and affected by the rental hikes than the English readers who tend to be the middle and upper middle classes are more able to afford expensive housing in the city. The imposition of rent controls, which is of the utmost importance to the common folk, has a more prominent place in the Chinese version so as to draw readers' attention.

Rearrangement of information not only takes place between paragraphs but also within the paragraph in the bilingual article. In the Chinese section of “或有人會質疑...憑感覺行事呢”, the phrase “單一思維” is in the first line. However, its English equivalent, that is, “the ideological”, has been moved to the last line of that paragraph and serves as a summary. On the contrary, there is no reordering within paragraphs in the translation. In the translation, only reordering within sentences is spotted, which in most cases is made due to convention of the English language. For instance, in the sentence “在二〇一三年，一共有四十三位議員發言了九個小時” and its English counterpart “there were 43 Members speaking for nine hours in 2013”, the year “in 2013” is relocated to the end of the sentence due to conventional style in English.

3. Differences in word choice

While the above discussions on presentation order focus on the levels of paragraphs and sentences, this section deals with a smaller unit- the word choice. It will cover three areas, namely, difference in the titles, use of ready-made expressions, and preservation of stylistic remarks.

Firstly, there is a more flexible word choice for the titles in bilingual writing than in translation. In Cheung's article, the Chinese title “房屋未來：關鍵時刻聚焦供應” contrasts with the English title “Trade-offs are needed to solve Hong Kong's housing problems”. To foster an efficient comparison, a literal translation of the Chinese title is provided- “The future of housing: Focusing on the supply at this critical juncture”. It is obvious that the Chinese and the English titles convey different messages with regard to the housing issues, in which the meanings of “critical juncture” (“關鍵時刻”) and “supply” (“供應”) are lost in the English and replaced by the word “trade-offs”. The Chinese title tries to use exaggerating wording such as “關鍵時刻” to draw audiences' attention, whereas the English version adopts the expression of “trade-offs” to capture the theme of the whole article for the benefit of the readers. On the other hand, in Lam's speech, the two headings in the English translation are largely the same as that in the Chinese original. They only differ slightly in the latter part of the second heading “繼續尋求共識、共建前路” (“Continuing to Build Consensus and Forge Ahead”): “共建前路” suggests that it requires concerted efforts between the government and the public, but “Forge Ahead” simply denotes “to make good progress” without the sense of togetherness (“Forge ahead”, n. d.).

Secondly, bilingual writing allows the adoption of ready-made expressions in another language, but translation does not. In the Chinese article, Cheung uses an English idiom “no pain, no gain” directly rather than rendering it into “一分耕耘，一分收穫”. This can be explained by Hong Kong citizens' habit of mixing English and Chinese to express ideas. This feature, however, is lost in Lam's speech- that no

Chinese common sayings are inserted untranslated into the English text. Yet, it may be argued that all Chinese expressions are rendered into English because of the fact that very few Westerners are able to read Chinese.

Thirdly, bilingual writing and translation lay different degrees of emphasis on stylistic remarks. In the Chinese version of Cheung's article, some phrases such as “房屋未來” bears the hallmark of CY Leung's style and the tone of his government. However, this flavour is gone in the English. Take “青年人的「房屋未來」” (“a future where our younger generation can look forward to better and more affordable housing”) as an example. Aiming to facilitate readers' comprehension and immediate understanding of the term, the author clearly explains the implicit meaning of “future for housing” in the English text at the expense of the Chief Executive's style. Translation, in contrast, is prone to preserve both the meaning and style as that in the original text, even though the target readers may not be able to understand the expression at first glance. For instance, in Lam's speech, “「居家安老」” is rendered as “ageing in place” which sums up the government policy for the English readers. For the word “in place” itself means being “at home with” and “in its usual or correct position” (“In place”, n. d.). “Ageing in place” is in fact a jargon “widely used in ageing policy” (Wiles, Leibing, Guberman, Reeve, & Allen, 2011, para. 1) and is defined as “the ability to live in one's own home and community safely, independently, and comfortably, regardless of age, income, or ability level” (Centres for Disease Control and Prevention, 2013). In short, the bilingual article places less emphasis on using direct translation but makes use of equivalent terms that already exist.

4. Discrepancy in content

Not only do bilingual writing and translation vary in word choice, but they also show distinct approaches in communication. The bilingual article is more flexible in content than the Chinese and the English version may present diverse details to

audiences, whereas translation is more rigid that the source text and the target text must correspond with one another. In Cheung's article, for example, he highlights different challenges in building transitional housing in the two versions. He mentions in the Chinese text that construction of transitional housing fails to make good use of the scarce land (“若能找到土地興建這類房屋，倒不如直接興建公屋？”) and the sites available for redevelopment are very limited (“有建議用一些短期空置的待重建樓宇提供過渡性房屋，但現實上究竟能擠出多少個這種棄置單位呢？按拆遷經驗，住戶一般住至最近限期才搬出，故此可用的空置期其實不會長。”). Nevertheless, in the English, he points out the problems of lacking enough “vacant sites” and “the necessary utilities and drainage systems”. In Lam's speech, on the contrary, the English translation gives identical information as that in the Chinese. For instance, they provide consistent rationales for the government's reservations about the principle that takes no heed of the economic means of affected residents.

Moreover, addition of information is found in bilingual writing but not in translation. At the level of the paragraph, a comparison between the two versions in Cheung's article reveals that the English paragraph “Though still criticised by some sceptics as being too conservative... We need a change of heart and a shift in mindset” has nothing that corresponds to it in the Chinese, whereas in Lam's speech, all paragraphs in English have corresponding paragraphs in Chinese.

At the level of the phrase, the English article tends to offer readers extra background information, which is not the case in translation. In Cheung's article, he includes the implementation period (i.e. “in 2012 and 2013”) for the “demand-management measures” in the English but not in Chinese (“政府已推出兩輪「需求管理」措施，以遏抑樓市過度亢奮。”; “In 2012 and 2013, we introduced two rounds of demand-management measures which helped to contain market exuberance.”). He also provides an explanation for “transitional housing” in the

English version, which states that transitional housing is “similar to the temporary housing areas of the early 1990s” (“市區劏房蔓延，遂有團體建議找地建「過渡性房屋」。”); “In the face of the proliferation of sub-divided units, some concern groups suggest building “transitional housing”, similar to the temporary housing areas of the early 1990s, by making use of short-term vacant government sites.”). However, in the translation, no additional information is found. For instance, unlike the practice in Cheung’s English article, Lam introduces neither the historical background nor the purposes of the scheme when mentioning the “Community Care Fund (CCF)” in her translated text. It can therefore be concluded that bilingual writing allows the author to provide additional information to facilitate readers’ understandings, whereas such a practice is not much observed in translation. In translation, whether to offer background information or explanations solely depends on the source text. Addition of information is sometimes crucial in the bilingual article in government publications, for in general, the non-Chinese are less familiar with the state’s policies and projects than the locals.

In addition, omission of information is found in the bilingual article but not in translation. This section will focus on the lexical level and specifically the figurative political terms. The first type of omission is the complete disappearance of the word itself and its meaning. For instance, in Cheung’s article, the expression of “插針起樓” itself and the idea are omitted in the English version. This is done to make it easier for the reader to understand. As foreign countries usually have a vast expanse of land and thus larger houses, the non-Chinese readers may not be able to understand how small and slender like needles the blocks are in this city with an acute shortage of land. In translation, however, both the political term and the idea are kept. Take “政治化妝” as an example. It is rendered into “political spin”, an expression with the same meaning but in a more vivid language for Westerners. According to Choy (2006), the

word “spin” is originally a common saying in baseball with which English readers are familiar, indicating “throwing a curveball to confuse the batter” (para. 4). Now it has been used as a slang to describe “an idea or situation that makes it seem better than it really is, especially in politics” (“Spin”, n. d.). It therefore unveils that translation attaches greater importance to keep the original idea and style of metaphor than bilingual writing.

The second type of omission is missing the word itself, but keeping the meaning, which can also be considered as an implicit way of expression. In Cheung’s article, the term “房屋階梯” is made implicit in English: it does not mention the word “property ladder”, but audiences are able to grasp the meaning as suggested by-- “to provide public rental housing to the grass roots; to assist lower-to middle-income households realise their home-ownership aspirations”. On the other hand, translation tends to keep both the political expression itself and its meaning. For instance, the term “N 無人士” in Lam’s speech is made explicit in English that it is rendered into “n have-nots” with an immediate explanation afterwards as provided in the Chinese source text (i.e. “who are neither public housing tenants nor Comprehensive Social Security Assistance recipients”). In short, while the bilingual article tends to make political concepts implicit that it keeps their meanings there without offering a bilingual version of the terms, the translation makes them explicit by giving a literal translation supplemented with explanations given in the source text.

5. Tone and reception

Apart from showing different degrees of consistency in content, Cheung’s article and Lam’s speech also differ in tone and reception. Being closely related to one another, the tone and reception will be discussed together in this section.

Although both the bilingual article and the translation are written in formal style, their tone may vary in terms of reception by audiences. Targeting at the general public,

Cheung's article adopts a neutral and rational tone in analysing the ongoing housing problems, for he hopes to convince citizens that the government has been making every endeavour to address the issue and to gain support from the public. On the other hand, Lam's speech, addressing mainly members of the Legislative Council, and particularly the pan-democrats, is marked by defensiveness and the sarcasm that goes with it, with the anticipation of a hostile reception as well as the intention to criticise some Members' irresponsible and biased speech. For instance, she mentions that “若果上述的三組數字都無法說服大家…我只能夠講句「無可奈何」” (“If such figures fail to convince Members...then there is nothing more we can do to convince them”). She also complains in the first paragraph that “但是我很快叫自己不要開心得太早，可能這是我一廂情願的，相信部分泛民的議員會辯解為他們將他們的發言時間留在最後的一個辯論環節來批評特區政府的管治。” (“But very quickly I told myself not to be happy so soon. This might only be my wishful thinking. Some pan-democratic Members would probably defend that they are saving their speaking time for the last session to criticise the governance by the SAR Government.”).

As for the consistency in tone in the Chinese and English texts, it is found that the bilingual article adopts a fairly different tone in the two versions, whereas the tone in translation mostly corresponds to that in the Chinese original. In Cheung's case, the English version is milder in tone and more touching. It mentions that “we need a change of heart and a shift in mind-set”, which appeals to both the feelings and reasoning of the readers, but this is not the case in the Chinese. Also, while the Chinese paragraph seems like blaming the public for not being determined enough, the English version tones down its language to get support from the sympathetic audience (“...若缺乏社會共識和意志去克服各類短期行為和小眾利益，一遇反對即叫停，則難以邁開大步從根本處解決供應問題。走不出困局，就改變不了命運，

那麼青年人的「房屋未來」又從何談起呢？”；“Now is the critical moment. We have to make our long-term housing strategy work in order to rebuild confidence in a future where our younger generation can look forward to better and more affordable housing. For their future, there is no going back.”).

However, in Lam’s speech, the tone of the translated English text is substantially the same as that of the Chinese source text, except for some quotations from other Members. Take the Hon Cyd Ho’s argument “全面走數” as an example. It is an everyday expression in Chinese and is widely used on informal occasions. Nevertheless, the translated version of “has reneged on all his promises” is regarded as a formal usage according to the Cambridge Dictionary (“renege”, n. d.).

6. Conclusion

Based on the comparison between Anthony Cheung’s article and Carrie Lam’s speech, this paper has demonstrated the differences between bilingual writing and translation in presentation order, choice of words, discrepancy in content, tone and reception, which are summarised in the table below.

	Bilingual writing (Cheung’s article)	Translation (Lam’s speech)
1. Reordering of paragraphs	✓	X
2. Reordering of information within paragraphs	✓ (to foster comprehension)	✓ (convention of the language)
3. Different word choice in titles/headings	✓ (major differences)	✓ (minor differences)
4. Use of ready-made expressions in	✓	X

another language		
5. Preservation of stylistic remarks	X	✓
6. Divergence in information	✓	X
7. Addition of information	✓	X
8. Omission of information	✓	X
9. Tone	Neutral and rational	Sarcastic and disapproving
10. Discrepancy in tone	✓	X
11. Reception	To persuade the public and to gain support	To criticise some members of the Legislative Council

To conclude, bilingual writing is more flexible in the presentation order, word choice, content and tone than translation.

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