

**A study of translation and the practice  
of bilingual writing with reference to two examples of public  
discourse in bilingual Hong Kong**

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1. Study the speech by the Chief Executive at the reception for the 19<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the establishment of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, and its English translation. Discuss the stylistic differences between this “bilingual” speech and the bilingual article by the Secretary for Transport and Housing which we studied in this course. Give at least 10 examples involving presentation order, choice of words, any discrepancy in content, tone and reception, etc.

By studying the speech by the Chief Executive at the reception for the 19<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the establishment of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region and its English translation and comparing it with the bilingual article by the Secretary for Transport and Housing, there is numerous stylistic differences between the bilingual speech and the bilingual article.

In general, the bilingual article is not entirely identical but the bilingual speech is identical, to a larger extent.

I would like to state some stylistic differences of the bilingual writing first as there are numerous differences in terms of all the aspects, like presentation order, choice of words etc. And to compare with the bilingual speech one by one.

The focuses of some paragraphs are different in terms of the presentation order. In the first paragraph, the English version focuses more on the seriousness of the housing

problem, it emphasises the problems rather than the action should be taken. The English version starts with the topic sentence of ‘Housing stands out as one of the most critical social problems haunting Hong Kong today’, while the Chinese version focuses more on the actions should be done by the concluding sentence ‘解決問題需要時間，社會矛盾需要疏導。’. However, both messages of actions and problem actually are expressed in both Chinese and English version in different presentation order. The focus of the housing problem actually has already been emphasised in the Chinese version with the title of the article ‘房屋未來：關鍵時刻 聚焦供應’ while the English version emphasises the actions should be taken in the title of ‘Trade-offs are needed to solve Hong Kong's housing problems’ and a little additional paragraph underneath instead. In this example, we can see that the different style of presentation order in Chinese and English. In Chinese, we may express a topic first and actions come next(problem-solution); but vice versa in English, what should be done comes first and then the subject that to be tackled(solution-problem). And, the focus of the paragraph always comes at the end as a concluding sentence in Chinese while the English version present the focus as the topic sentence.

Can we find something similar in the bilingual speech? Yes, there is some reordering of the sentences, but there is no obvious divergence in the presentation order like the bilingual article. The reordering of sentences in the bilingual speech are just to improve the readability in the other language – English. In other words, the reordering has nothing to do with the message, but only the difference between the syntax of Chinese and English. For example, ‘As with several hundred other old industrial buildings in Hong Kong, the industrial building on fire lacked an automatic sprinkler system.’ Versus ‘起火的工業大廈和香港其他幾百幢的老舊工業大廈一樣，並沒有安裝自動灑水消防系統’. The subject ‘industrial building on fire’ is moved to the centre of the sentence rather than the beginning of the sentence like the Chinese version does. The ordering of the sentence is a little bit different, but not necessarily the presentation order. And the focus of the message is not affected.

In terms of word choices, the Chinese version of the bilingual article seems to use the grander phrase to express the meaning. The English version tends to be subtler in word choice. For example, ‘目標宏圖’, ‘大方向、大框架’ in Chinese and ‘production target’, ‘framework’ in English. It may be a little bit difficult to distinguish the difference between these words, but actually the level of formality is different. It is

evident that the use of officialise is greater in the Chinese than in the English version. It shows that the Chinese version is more aggressive than the English version in terms of word choices.

However, in the bilingual speech, the word choices are mostly loyal to the source text, Chinese version. It is insensible that there is a difference in level between the Chinese and English version in terms of the word choices. For example, ‘共同努力’ as ‘concerted efforts’; ‘堅決做好’ as ‘remain resolute in its work’. From these example, they are actually a pair of words at the same level.

In terms of some rhetoric and idiomatic expressions, the bilingual article does not include all the same rhetoric and idiomatic expressions in the two versions. Instead of directly translating the Chinese rhetoric and idiomatic expressions, the bilingual article chooses to adopt the similar expression and meaning in different styles. First, is to rewrite it. The rewriting is not necessarily loyal to each other, the meaning of these expressions may diverge after rewriting but mostly the similar meaning can be kept. For example, ‘重建房屋階梯’, ‘事倍功半’, ‘舉步維艱’, ‘「即食」靈丹’ – these expressions are not completely retained in the English version. Moreover, the whole paragraph is actually rewritten, to a certain extent. In the English version, ‘such challenges are daunting’, ‘luxury of "zero impact" solutions’ are used to describe the ‘difficulty - 舉步維艱’ and there is no perfect solution. Some of the meaning is distorted like the meaning of ‘事倍功半’ cannot be extracted from the English version. In the English version, it just states that ‘these daunting challenges have to be tackled head-on’. Specifically, ‘重建房屋階梯, 協助基層「上樓」、中產「置居」’ has been rewritten by stating the specific actions that the government will do. The rewriting actually shows the implied meaning of the Chinese original version instead of using generalization to make the meaning implicit. The complexity in Chinese version is erased by simple English in the English version. In Chinese, there is always some metaphors to express the meaning but not in English. Therefore, the Chinese version may be more interesting than the English version as the variety of idiomatic expression.

Rewriting aside, the bilingual article also uses omission to deal with these rhetoric and idiomatic expressions. The reason for it is the complexity of the Chinese expression, and it is hard to be translate into English directly. For example, ‘辣招’,

‘「插針起樓」’, ‘杯水車薪’ – these expressions are omitted in the English version. If these expressions are to be translated, it can be ‘cooling measures’ and ‘pin from the floor’. However, as a bilingual writing, they need not to be necessarily 100% translated. Some expressions are better not to be kept in another language because they are odd and strange. If these expressions are not important, they are omitted.

What about the bilingual speech? As mentioned, the bilingual speech is more like a translation than a bilingual writing. It is unsurprising that these rhetoric and idiomatic expressions are preserved in the English version. For example, ‘「適度有為，穩中求變」’ and ‘being appropriately proactive and seeking change while maintaining stability’; ‘求大同、存小異’ and ‘set aside differences, find common ground’ – it is noticeable that they are a pair, parallel and identical in meaning to a larger extent. Although the phrase is lengthened and the original structure is lost in the English version, they still actually look fine in English. For some folk adage, the English version tries to match the meaning with idiomatic expression with similar meaning in English instead of offering a direct translation. For example, ‘食老本’ as ‘rest on laurels’, which means stop trying because one is satisfied with one's past achievements. The bilingual speech keeps the subtlety and the sentence order of the Chinese version.

However, the excessive loyalty to the Chinese version of the bilingual speech makes some parts of the English version odd. Somethings need to be omitted are not omitted; and some translations are odd to see. For example, there is one sentence in the English version – ‘we can certainly overcome challenges large and small’ which comes from ‘我們必然可以克服一切困難’. ‘一切困難’ has been translated to ‘challenges large and small’. Also, in the pair of ‘enhance the upward social mobility’ and ‘創造更多向上流動的機會’ also sounds odd. Due to the excessive loyalty to the source text, something is extra. In ‘enhance the upward social mobility’, the word ‘enhance’ already means to ‘make the social mobility upward’, it is unnecessary to use the word ‘upward’ again. To a certain extent, the excessive loyalty makes the bilingualism fail.

The bilingual article uses a lot of nominalization to make the English version more English-like. In direct translation, it is noticeable that there is always some oddness when reading some of the long sentences in the translated text as they are not nominalized and not being rewritten to look like the target language. However, it is

not the case in the bilingual article. For example, ‘供求嚴重失衡’ as ‘serious imbalance in supply and demand’; and ‘土地供應、規劃配套需時，大規模土地開發（如新界東北）和更改土地用途’ as ‘the adequate and timely supply of land, especially through new development areas, and the review and rezoning of some existing sites’. The verb phrase in Chinese version has been rewritten into noun phrase which makes the whole sentence more readable and more English-like. In other words, it reduces the oddness and strangeness when reading the English version.

As mentioned, the bilingual speech is merely a translation. The nominalization did not take place in the bilingual speech. The verb phrase in Chinese version remains unchanged as a verb phrase in English version which deliver a sense of oddness. For example, ‘財政穩健，通脹溫和，失業率低’ is translated to ‘maintained a sound fiscal position, inflation has been mild, and the unemployment rate has stayed at a low level’. The direct translation of the verb phrases is clumsy and odd. Nominalization should be done here to eliminate the gap between Chinese and English. Therefore, a better translation or rewriting will be similar to what have been done in the bilingual article – nominalization. For instance, ‘maintained a sound fiscal position, mild inflation and low unemployment rate.’

In terms of the tone, the negativity in Chinese which can be found in the bilingual article is strong. The Chinese version demonstrates a strong sense of negativity in expressing ideas while the English version did not. For example, ‘充滿疑慮以至抗拒’ is rewritten as ‘local community concerns’. ‘疑慮以至抗拒’ applies more negativity in terms of the word choice. However, the English version simply express it with a more neutral word ‘concerns’. The level of negativity is stronger in Chinese while the English version keeps a neutral tone in expressing the ideas. Sometimes the tone is even positive in English version while the Chinese version expresses ideas negatively. For instance, ‘they have to be tackled head-on’ and ‘但若克服不了這些困難和阻力’. In English version, it stated that the challenges need to be tackle in a simple positive sentence. On the contrary, the Chinese version uses ‘但若’ and a negative phrase ‘不了’ to express the same meaning which says these hurdles and obstacles need to be conquered.

Moreover, rhetorical questions are often used in the Chinese version of the bilingual article. For example, the pair of ‘但現實上究竟能擠出多少個這種棄置單位呢？’

and ‘we do not have a lot of such vacant sites’. It is noticeable that the answer of the questions in Chinese is actually the English version. However, the Chinese version chooses to present the idea by a question instead of a statement. In addition, some questions which do not correspond to the English version are also found in Chinese version. For instance, ‘則負責任的政府又怎能只顧一點、不及其餘，憑感覺行事呢?’ With all these rhetorical questions, the tone of the Chinese version is more sarcastic and ironic. The English version is more flat in terms of tone.

In the bilingual speech, the tone is always the same in both language. However, it is because the original Chinese version is already delivered in a positive sense. Different from the bilingual article, the tone of the speech is positive and without any ironic tone in it. It is because it is a speech by CE at reception for 19th anniversary of establishment of HKSAR while the article is more like a commentary.

However, in the bilingual speech, there are also some distinction between the Chinese and English writing. It is the repetition of the subject in a sentence. In Chinese, when the subject appears in the beginning of the sentence, it is usual to continue the sentence without repeating the subject again. In the bilingual speech, it has been seen too. For instance, ‘香港的新一代，除了內地的機遇，還多了「一帶一路」的國外機遇，可以將香港企業進一步發展成為跨國企業。’; ‘特區政府七個多月前成立了創新及科技局，今年投入 180 億元推動創科措施，並且繼續鼓勵發展電影、時裝設計等創意產業。’ – the subject of ‘香港的新一代’ and ‘特區政府’ only appear once in the beginning in these two Chinese sentence, and the sentences go on without repeating the subject. However, it is not the case in English. The subject appears twice in each of the following sentences – ‘Hong Kong's new generation can take advantage of overseas opportunities arising from the Belt and Road initiative, in addition to those in the Mainland. The young generation will be able to further expand Hong Kong enterprises into global enterprises.’; ‘the SAR Government established the Innovation and Technology Bureau over seven months ago, and allocated \$18 billion this year to promote innovation and technology. The Government will continue to encourage the development of creative industries, such as film and fashion design industries.’ The reason for it may be long sentences are usually avoided in English. In English writing, we seldom use comma repeatedly in expressing multiple ideas but we do in Chinese. Therefore, it is inevitable to separate the ideas into couple of sentences with the repetition of the subject in English writing.

Back to the bilingual article, there is nothing like that. The reason for it may be the fundamental stylistic difference between the bilingual article and the bilingual speech. The English version of the bilingual article is actually an adaptation rather than a translation. Therefore, the above issues in the bilingual speech can be avoided substantially when it comes to the bilingual article.

One more mentionable point for the bilingual article is that there are some paragraphs actually are not corresponding to each other. For example, the paragraph of the ‘With the government taking firm demand-management measures...’ and ‘We are in a "housing dilemma"...’ in the later part of the article are some additional twist which cannot be found in the Chinese version. Some additional and further arguments are added while rewriting and they make the article more effective in terms of arguments. These two additional paragraphs reiterate and reinforce the seriousness of the problem and how much concerted effort the society need to make in order to deal with challenges. As mentioned at the beginning of the essay, the focus of the first part of the English version is more on the seriousness of the problem. And here in the ending part of the article, it reinforces the seriousness and make the article more effective.

The effectiveness of the bilingual speech is mainly the same although there is also some discrepancy which makes the speech better in Chinese than English. In the later part of the speech, ‘不幸殉職’ corresponds with ‘passed away’. It does not imply the meaning of ‘unfortunate’ in the English version. However, this is just a mild discrepancy to make the Chinese version slightly better than the English version. After all, the English version of the bilingual speech is a translation. It is unsurprising that the original Chinese version works better than the translated version. Overall speaking, the effectiveness of the bilingual speech is the same, the difference in effectiveness of the bilingual speech is not as obvious as that of the bilingual article.

To conclude, the bilingual speech is a translation rather than a bilingual writing. The overall style is simple, loyal to the source text, but sometimes mechanical. It is easy to compare the bilingual speech because the Chinese and English version are identical. And the readers of both versions can receive and share the same message.

On the contrary, the bilingual article is a true bilingual writing, like a semantic

translation but more than that, maybe an adaptation. There are different additions and amendments in terms of everything. To a certain extent, it makes the English version even more completed and effective than the Chinese version. However, it also makes the reader of the two versions may not share the same message delivered.

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