

# *On the Translation of Government Work Report from the Perspective of Skopos Theory*

—A Case Study of “2016 Government Work Report”

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**Abstract**—Political document is an important means to propagate the policies of the authority. Its translation quality will not only have a direct impact on the efficiency of political publicity, but also have great influence on China’s image in the international community. This paper is involved with Vermeer’s Skopos theory, Reiss’s text typology and Nord’s function plus loyalty. With an analysis of the text features of government work report, the author explores several feasible translation strategies at lexical level, syntactical level, textual level and cultural level respectively.

**Keywords**—government work report; Skopos theory; translation strategies

## I. INTRODUCTION

Political documents are the important carriers of China’s policy and political development. On one hand, political documents denote the state policies initiated by the Communist Party of China (CPC) and Chinese government. These policies are for people’s benefits. On the other hand, with the help of political documents, people of other countries can have an easy and authoritative access to China’s national conditions. In that case, the translation of political document will have a great influence on the efficiency of political publicity. And to a large extent, it is closely connected with the image of China in the international community. So the translation of political documents deserves our great efforts.

Functionalist Skopos theory emerged in Germany at the end of 1970s and became famous gradually around the world. It focuses on the purpose of translation and stresses that translation is a communicative activity with certain purposes. Thus it has got rid of “equivalence” [1] which the linguistic school has always advocated. The English version of the government work report, whose target readers are foreigners speaking English, is a kind of unique political publicity material. So it is necessary to research on the translation of government work report from the perspective of Skopos theory. The translation strategies have been always a hot topic.

In the paper, after analyzing the text features of the government work report, the author gives a case study as well as theoretical analysis to the translation of government work report. And the author tries to give a comprehensive study of it

translation strategies from lexical, syntactic, textual and cultural levels.

## II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: FUNCTIONALIST SKOPOS THEORY

Skopos theory emerged in 1970s in Germany, as a part of Functionalist translation theory. It made the study’s attention shifted from the source language to the target language. According to Skopos theory, translation is an activity with an aim or purpose. To translate means to produce a target text in a target setting for a target purpose and target addressees in target circumstances (Vermeer, 1984)[2]. In Skopos theory, the status of the source text is lower than it is in equivalence-based theories of translation. The source is an “offer of information”, which the translator turns into an “offer of information” for the target audience (Christiane Nord, 1997).

The most famous translators of this school are Katharina Reiss, Hans Vermeer and Christine Nord. Reiss put forward text typology, Vermeer put forward the Skopos theory, while Nord text analysis and function plus loyalty.

### *A. Three rules of skopos theory*

According to Vermeer’s Skopos theory, there are three general rules we should follow in translation, i.e. Skopos rule, Coherence rule and Fidelity rule.

Firstly, translation is a sort of action with purpose. The purpose of translation determines the strategies and methods. And the skopos of translation could be considered as the result of association between the translator and client. In the process of translating government work report into its English edition, the client is the central government, while the translators are some experts. Then the purpose of translating could be very clear, which is to introduce China’s development pattern and domestic and foreign policies to people of other countries. To translate the source text, the translators should choose appropriate strategies for the better realization of the purpose.

Secondly, the Coherence rule requires that our translation should be intelligible to foreigners. On one hand, we need to adopt appropriate strategies to keep the text features of government. On the other, the target readers shall have no problem understanding the English version of government

work report. If they are contradictory with each other, we should take the information transfer as a priority.

Thirdly, the Fidelity rule requires the translators to obtain precise understanding of the original text and translate the original text with appropriate methods. And what the translators express should be the same with the original meaning. The translation and the original text may not be the same word by word. The extent of fidelity is dependent on the skopos and the translator's comprehension of the original text..

#### *B. Text typology*

Katharina Reiss[3] put forward a model of translation criticism based on the functional relationship between the source and the target text. The government work report is mainly about government's work over the past year and some new polices or targets. The premier of the State Council reports to the deputies of CPPCC, and the deputies stand for Chinese people, which is a unique way for Chinese people to exercise their right as the owner of the country. So the government work report could be regarded as a text with the main function of information transfer. And the English version of government work report is to convey the development pattern and conditions to the international community, so as to facilitate their understanding of China's politics and polices. Therefore, the source and target text share some basic functions. With such a prerequisite, we can use Reiss's text typology to analyze the government work report.

On the whole, the main function of government work report is an informative-type text. And it is a very typical Chinese political text, which features with its text structure, sentence pattern, and words of Chinese style. It denotes the special political culture in China. To translate the government work report, these features should be remained under the circumstance that there is no lack or distortion of its original meaning. If they are contradictory with each other, then we should be faithful to the original meaning first.

#### *C. Nord's theory[4]*

According to function plus loyalty theory, the translators should produce functional target texts which conform to the requirements of the translation skopos. And the rights of both the author of the original text and target readers of the translation should also be respected. The English version of the government work report must meet the skopos, which is to introduce China's politics and policies to English readers. So the translators have to respect the benefits of both the Chinese government and English readers. On one hand, the translation of government work report should reflect the Chinese government's stands truly. On the other, the translators have to consider the language habits and culture of English readers for the better fulfillment of skopos.

According to Nord, documentary translation provides a documentation of a source culture communication in the target language, in which any explanation for the target culture readers is given outside the text. Political essays, news and academic proses all belong to documentary translation. Thus the translation of government work report is also a kind of documentary translation.

### III. STRATEGIES ON THE C-E TRANSLATION OF GOVERNMENT WORK REPORT FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF FUNCTIONALIST SKOPOS THEORY

In this chapter, the author will analyze the strategies of translation from several aspects and give a case study of the 2016 Government Work Report.

#### *A. Simplification*

Sometimes we can use the simplification strategy to delete certain original expressions in translating. However, it does not refer to the cancellation of essential meaning of the original text. And instead, translators must make sure that what they have canceled won't harm the completeness of the main idea. So this strategy can't be used without limits, and it must be based on the translator's precise understanding of the original text and careful consideration as well.

According to Vermeer's Skopos [5] theory, the main purpose of translation is to make the target readers get a better knowledge of China's politic and policies, and the purpose determines the translation strategies. It seems that simplification is not in line with fidelity rule, but the proper application of it can better fulfill Skopos rule and coherence rule which are of vital importance in Skopos theory. From the two aspects, we can conclude that the transfer of information is more important than keeping the original forms. Hence, in order to make the translation terse and natural, those repeated expressions, category words and tautology could be deleted.

Example 1: ...攻坚克难...

Translation: .....have worked to overcome obstacles...

Example 2:注重解决放权不同步、不协调、不到位问题。

Translation: We will focus on addressing unsynchronized, uncoordinated, and incomplete delegation of powers.

According to Reiss's text typology, 2016 Government Work Report is an informative-type text, whose translation should focus on the transfer of information. To solve the problem of tautology, the translator could use the strategy of simplification. As in example 1, “攻坚” 和 “克难” actually share the same meaning. For the target readers, it is redundant. In example 2, “问题” (problem) is deleted, which refers to negative things. It is a typical category word in Chinese. The function of category words is not so important compared with other words. And it is needless for the translator to use the literal strategy to translate it.

#### *B. Explanatory translation*

A large number of expressions are unique to Chinese language. They are difficult to translate literally because of the specific background information they carry. Chinese people are familiar with their culture, but foreigners may not. Target readers will find it difficult to understand the literal translation of some expressions for lack of background knowledge. And in some cases, equivalents do not exist, so literal translation will fail to realize translation skopos. Then we had better adopt explanatory translation strategy to make translations intelligible and clear in meaning and easier to understand.

Example 3: 坚决纠正“四风”，严格执行国务院“约法三章”。

Translation: ...action was taken against formalism, bureaucratism, hedonism, and extravagance, and rigorous efforts were made to carry out the State Council's three-point decision on curbing government spending.

Example 4: 面对“三期叠加”的局面……

Translation: While dealing with the slowdown in economic growth, making difficult structural adjustments, and absorbing the effects of previous economic stimulus policies……

In example 3, “四风” and “约法三章” are abbreviations in Chinese. In order to make it easier to understand, the translators have given their full forms in English and even added some explanatory information to them. The same is with the example 4. “三期叠加” means that we are confronted with three kinds of difficulties in economic development. Then in the translation, the translators explained what the three difficulties were.

### C. Substitution

It has been mentioned that repetition is common in government work report. And repetition phenomena facilitate the coherence of the text. To deal with repetition in translation, we can also use substitution strategy except for the simplification strategy. Let's analyze this problem according to Nord's function plus loyalty. Firstly, the original text is informative-type text. If we employ literal translation strategy regardless of the differences in reference between the source text and target text, it will do harm to the transfer of information. Secondly, loyalty is different from fidelity. Loyalty to the English readers requires the translators to consider the reading expectation and experience of target readers, rather than pursue fidelity in any circumstances. Therefore, we need to pay attention to the difference between Chinese and English in reference and take English readers' reading habits into account, so as to make the English rendition more natural.

Example 5: 去年世界经济增速为6年最低，国际贸易增速更低，大宗商品价格深度下跌，国际金融市场震荡加剧，对我国经济造成直接冲击和影响。

Translation: In 2015, world economic growth fell to its lowest rate in six years, growth in international trade slowed, commodity prices plummeted, and there was growing volatility in the global financial market. All this had a direct impact on China's economy.

This example is a long Chinese sentence with many unfavorable conditions listed. It would be difficult to transfer it in just one English sentence. So the translation use “all this” to refer to them, which makes the translation terser and easier to understand.

## IV. SOME GENERAL PRINCIPLES OF TRANSLATION

### A. Full understanding of the text

Generally speaking, Chinese people usually have no problem with Chinese essays. However, when it comes to translation, we may understand its literal meaning but its real meaning. It is a vital shortcoming of many people to start translating without full understanding of the original text. When coming across some words or phrases that we are not sure about, full and precise understanding will make our translation better.

In political documents like government work report, there are a number of words or phrases which include political concepts such as state policy, territory and sovereignty. In order to translate them precisely, we need to explore more about them in political aspect. For example:

- ① “全面建成小康社会” to finish building a moderately prosperous society in all respects.
- ② “全面建设小康社会” to build a moderately prosperous society in all respects.
- ③ “海外侨胞” Chinese nationals overseas.

“全面建成小康社会” is a new political concept proposed in the 18th National Congress of CPC in 2012. Since then, it has appeared in annual government work report. It is different from what we used to say “全面建设小康社会”. Literally, the difference between them is just one word. However, there is a great gap between them in meaning. In a bid to translate it precisely, we need to grasp more knowledge about the background information of two phrases. Changing “建设” into “建成” shows the confidence and determination of CPC and central government. So the translation of the phrase should suggest such subtle significance.

“海外侨胞” means people with Chinese nationality living abroad. Since dual-nationality is against the law in China, that group of people shall not get the citizenship of other countries. It is wrong to translate the phrase as “overseas Chinese”. It's better for us to have a clear idea about the difference of these political concepts. Actually, “overseas Chinese” means “海外华人” in Chinese, which includes Chinese citizens living abroad and foreign citizens of Chinese origin. Some southeastern countries are sensitive to overseas Chinese problem. Some needless disputes may be caused by mistakes in the translation of these phrases.

### B. Be correct in politics

As the English poet Andrew Marvell said, a translator would be the “Translation's thief” if he adds or leaves out anything from the source text. We had better pay a particular high emphasis on faithfulness in the translation of government work report. Because it is involved with state policies and stands of the central government. A small mistake in translation may cause a serious incident.

### C. Translation of typical terms

Since the English language and culture are different from Chinese language and culture in many ways, equivalence

sometimes is impossible. So the only method is to create new words or expressions according to the rules of English language. Some excellent translators have created new expressions to translate some typical terms. And those translations have been a tradition that we should follow, although they seem to be Chinglish. There are many political words whose translations are widely acknowledged and must be followed. For example:

- ①“‘三个代表’重要思想”Theory of Three Represents
- ②“深港通” Shenzhen-Hong Kong Stock Connect.
- ③“科学发展观” Scientific Outlook on Development

#### V. CONCLUSIONS

Government work report is a typical political document, which plays a significant role in China's external publicity. Its translation quality has a direct influence on China's image in the international community. So the translators should be devoted to making their translations accurate and qualified.

In this paper, the author analyzes the application of Skopos theory to the C-E translation of 2016 Government Work Report. According to Reiss's text typology, the 2016 Government Work Report is mainly an informative text. Thus the translators should try to keep the functions or features of the source text with no loss of information. And if both of them are contradictory with each other, the transfer of information should be the priority. According to Vermeer's Skopos theory, the translation of government work report should serve for its skopos or purpose. So the purpose has determined what strategies translators should choose. The purpose of its translation is to introduce China's policies,

condition and development pattern to people of other countries. In translation of government work report, Skopos rule should come first, and then the Coherence rule and Fidelity rule. According to Nord, the translators need to enable target readers to grasp the cultural information of the source text, [6]and make the translation of government work report conform to the target readers' thinking mode. In conclusion, the government work report is mainly an informative text. So its translation ought to focus on the accurate transfer of information. With no loss of information, the form and cultural features of government work report should be kept to the greatest extent.

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