

Original Paper

The Application of Discourse Cohesion Theory in the 2024 Government Work Report

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Abstract

As an official medium and important channel for external communication, the translation of the Government Work Report into another language must maintain the coherence and cohesion of the discourse, which has a significant impact on the national image and the effectiveness of cultural value dissemination. Guided by discourse cohesion theory, this study analyzes the challenges in translating the report to demonstrate how various cohesive devices play a role in the translation of such texts. The article focuses on five aspects of translation: reference, substitution, ellipsis, conjunction, and lexical collocation, with specific examples provided for illustration. Given the notable differences between English and Chinese cohesive devices, translation methods such as addition, omission, and repetition are required to achieve effective translation outcomes. Under the guidance of cohesion theory, translators can develop a stronger awareness of discourse and a global perspective on translation, thereby enhancing the external communication effectiveness of the translated text.

Keywords

Government Work Report, Discourse Coherence Theory, Translation of political documents

1. Introduction to Discourse Cohesion

Cohesion theory has garnered broad consensus in the field of translation research and practice, with numerous scholars continuously advancing its theoretical development and practical application. Huang Guowen (1988) systematically elaborated on the significant role of grammatical, lexical, and textual devices in constructing explicit logical connections within discourse, laying the groundwork for subsequent research. Building on this foundation, Liu Qingyuan (2004) broke through the traditional framework of translation studies by innovatively introducing a discourse analysis perspective. He systematically explored how differentiated translation strategies can reconstruct cohesion and coherence mechanisms in translated texts, marking a methodological shift in the application of this theory within

translation studies. With the evolution of discourse linguistics research paradigms, this theoretical framework has been widely applied across multiple dimensions of translation studies, continuously promoting the construction of disciplinary theoretical systems and the innovation of practical models. Specifically, in the context of translation practice within Chinese-language settings, Xu Lina's (2012) research revealed the particularities of cross-linguistic transformation of cohesive devices. She pointed out that English cohesive mechanisms such as reference and substitution often need to be converted into repetitive rhetorical strategies in Chinese to achieve equivalent expression. At the practical level, numerous master's and doctoral dissertations in recent years have used specialized discourses in politics, economics, tourism, and other fields as case studies, systematically validating the guiding value of cohesion theory for translation practice across different genres and establishing an operable analytical methodology.

Despite significant progress in multiple dimensions, current research still exhibits a noticeable gap in the study of cohesive mechanisms in popular science texts. Such texts possess both specialized and communicative characteristics, yet the patterns of transformation for their cohesive devices have not been systematically explored. This study aims to develop a cohesion transformation model tailored to popular science texts and propose a targeted framework of translation strategies. This will expand the applicability of cohesion theory and offer new methodological perspectives for translation research on specialized genres.

2. Analysis of the Application of Discourse Cohesion Theory in Political Document Translation

To address the translation of a series of Chinese-characteristic phrases in political literature, through extensive collection and comparison, we can analyze that this type of literature has five significant features: (1) There are many repetitive phrases in the language, and the sentences are relatively long with a single sentence structure; (2) Imperative verb structures and parallel clauses are common; (3) The subject is lacking; (4) The use of connecting components is limited; (5) There is no clear logical relationship between sentences. During the translation process, the differences in the connection methods between the source text and the target language make it difficult for word-for-word or sentence-for-sentence translations to achieve functional equivalence with the original text and accurately convey the ideological connotations of the original text.

The political nature, seriousness, and accuracy of political literature require that the translation must be meticulous to ensure the complete output of cultural value. Therefore, the translator must pay attention to the connection features of sentences and carry out translation under the guidance of correct connection theories.

2.1 Reference

In discourse, "if the interpretation of a word cannot be derived from the word itself but must be sought from the object it refers to, a referential relationship is established" (Halliday & Hasan, 1976:31). As previously mentioned, referential cohesion in English can be categorized into personal reference,

demonstrative reference, and comparative reference. Among these, demonstrative references such as "this," "that," "there," and "those" are most frequently used in the Government Work Report. However, due to the complexity of discourse elements, readers often need to exert considerable effort to connect contextual clues or consult background knowledge to accurately identify the specific referent. Directly translating these referential cohesive words often leads to ambiguity in the meaning conveyed by the translated text. When handling such cohesive devices during English-Chinese translation, translators may, out of habit or for the sake of convenience, assume that the referent corresponds to the concept or meaning immediately following the referential word. This unreflective adherence to the original referential terms can result in deviations in the interpretation of the translated text from the original meaning.

Example 1:

ST: 稳是大局和基础，进是方向和动力。

TT: Stability is of overall importance, as **it** is the basis for everything we do; making progress is our goal, and **it** is also what motivates us.

In the official translation, the addition of the two instances of "it" serves as a core strategy for handling the paratactic structure of Chinese and constructing hypotactic cohesion in English. The first "it" in the phrase "as it is the basis..." refers back to "Stability." Not only does it provide a grammatical subject for the causal conjunction "as," but it also makes explicit the logical relationship implied in the Chinese—that "stability is important because it serves as the foundation"—by embedding it into a complete clause. The second "it" in "and it is also what motivates us" refers back to "making progress." Its dual functions are to avoid repetition of the nominal subject, thereby enhancing conciseness, and to work in tandem with "and" to form a coordinate clause, clearly linking the second attribute of "progress" (as a driving force) to itself. These two instances of "it" are not merely added arbitrarily; rather, they are grammatically anchored points proactively established by the translator. They transform the semantically juxtaposed relationships in Chinese—which rely on parataxis—into an explicit referential network in English, realized through pronoun reference and logical connectors. This ensures that the translation achieves clear reference, compact structure, and full compliance with the norms of English hypotactic expression. In summary, by adding "it," the translator essentially converts semantic juxtaposition in Chinese into grammatical reference in English, thereby achieving logical explicitness, clear reference, and idiomatic expression in the translated text.

Example 2:

ST: 两次降低存款准备金率、两次下调政策利率，科技创新、先进制造、普惠小微、绿色发展等贷款大幅增长。

TT: Required reserve ratios and policy interest rates were lowered two times, and **there** was a significant increase in loans issued to support scientific and technological innovation, advanced manufacturing micro and small businesses, and green development initiatives.

In the official translation, the addition of "there" to construct the existential sentence "there was..." represents a creative cohesive strategy for handling Chinese zero-subject structures and multiple

juxtaposed noun phrases. The original sentence, "科技创新、先进制造、普惠小微、绿色发展等贷款大幅增长," is a typical Chinese topic-comment structure (or zero-subject serial clause). Its information focus is the phenomenon or result—"贷款大幅增长"—while the preceding series of modifiers, "科技创新、先进制造...", specifies the domains to which this phenomenon relates. Rather than mechanically translating it into a subject-predicate-object structure such as "Loans for A, B, C... increased significantly," which would result in a top-heavy sentence, the translator opted for the existential construction: "there was a significant increase in loans issued to support...". Here, "there" serves the core function of establishing a new informational starting point and framework: it does not refer to any specific location but acts purely as a grammatical introductory word, signaling the imminent statement of a phenomenon or fact. This subtly shifts the reader's attention from "who or what increased" (a lengthy subject) to "what happened" (the event of "increase" itself). At the same time, the "there"-introduced framework allows the subsequent lengthy modifier, "in loans issued to support...", to naturally attach as a prepositional phrase, providing supplementary information about the "increase." This reorganizes the original structure, where multiple elements are juxtaposed and semantically condensed into a "heavy subject," into a sentence structure that aligns with English preferences for clear hierarchy and predicate prominence. Thus, it effectively avoids the structural imbalance and comprehension difficulties caused by an excessively long subject.

2.2 Substitution

English tends to avoid repetition and pursues lexical and syntactic variety, often employing substitution to prevent redundancy. As Zhu Yongsheng, Zheng Lixin, and Miao Xingwei (2006: 39) point out, "In discourse, because the meaning of a substitute must be retrieved from the component it replaces, substitution plays a non-negligible role in linking context." Li Changshuan (2004: 261) notes that English nominal substitutes such as one, ones, the same, and so are often translated into Chinese as "同样的" or "一样的," while verbal substitutes like do or do so may be rendered as "干," "来," "弄," or "搞." Similarly, clausal substitutes such as so or not often become "(不)这样," "(不)这么," "(不)是," or "不然" in Chinese. However, in many specific contexts, it is difficult to find direct Chinese equivalents that mirror the substitution patterns of English. English relies on inflectional forms, allowing nominal substitutes to distinguish between singular and plural, and verbal substitutes to indicate tense. The use of substitution in English depends heavily on lexicogrammatical relations, while Chinese lacks such rich grammatical means. Consequently, substitution occurs less frequently in Chinese, which often employs lexical repetition to achieve cohesion. In the process of translation, if the translator fails to grasp the differences between English and Chinese, they may struggle to find equivalent expressions in the target language, leading to deviations from the original meaning and an inability to accurately convey the cohesive effect achieved by substitution in the source text.

Example 3:

ST: 强化宏观政策逆周期和跨周期调节, 继续实施积极的财政政策和稳健的货币政策, 加强政策工具创新和协调配合。

TT: We should intensify counter- and cross-cyclical adjustments through macro policies, continue to implement a proactive fiscal policy and a prudent monetary policy, and strengthen coordination between policy instruments while developing new **ones**.

In the official translation, the use of the nominal substitute "ones" to replace the previously mentioned "policy instruments" exemplifies the flexible application of English substitution as a cohesive device, adapting to its morphological diversity norms. In the original sentence, "加强政策工具创新和协调配合," the core noun "政策工具" appears twice, paired with "创新" and "协调配合" respectively. Chinese naturally achieves cohesion through semantic juxtaposition and the serial use of verb phrases, adhering to its convention of repeating the original term. However, the translator rendered the latter part as "while developing new ones," where the use of "ones" is crucial: it grammatically and precisely substitutes the preceding plural noun "policy instruments," ensuring agreement in number. Its cohesive effect lies in avoiding the repetition of lengthy noun phrases within the same clause, resulting in a compact structure that is linguistically economical and idiomatic. Meanwhile, translating "创新" as "developing new ones" and pairing it with "coordination" highlights the parallel logical relationship between "developing new instruments" and "making good use of existing ones." This approach not only accurately conveys the original meaning but also achieves the conciseness and dynamic quality characteristic of English sentence structures through the use of substitution.

Example 4:

ST: 扎实推进共同富裕，促进社会和谐稳定，不断增强人民群众的获得感、幸福感、安全感。

TT: We will make solid progress toward prosperity for all and promote social harmony and stability. By doing **so**, we will give our people a growing sense of fulfillment, happiness, and security.

In the official translation, the use of the clausal substitute "so" in the phrase "By doing so" exemplifies a typical strategy of employing English substitution as a cohesive device to achieve explicit logical connections and structural conciseness in discourse. In the original Chinese sentence, "扎实推进共同富裕，促进社会和谐稳定" and "不断增强人民群众的获得感、幸福感、安全感" share an implicit "means-purpose" or "action-result" logical relationship, but they are formally presented only through semantic juxtaposition. Recognizing this underlying logic, the translator employs the structure "By doing so" to make the connection explicit. Here, "so" substitutes for the series of actions described in the preceding clause—"We will make solid progress...and promote..." Its cohesive effect lies in succinctly summarizing and anaphorically referring to the aforementioned composite actions, packaging them as a whole into an adverbial of manner ("By doing so"), thereby clearly and concisely introducing the subsequent result ("we will give..."). This approach not only avoids repeating the complex verb-object structures from the preceding text, ensuring concise and fluid writing, but also elevates the implicit causal relationship in Chinese to the surface level of English syntax through grammatical means (the prepositional phrase functioning as an adverbial). This achieves the explicit manifestation of logical relationships and a layered, hierarchical textual structure.

2.3 Ellipsis

Ellipsis is a syntactic phenomenon in which the use of ellipsis presupposes the existence of the omitted elements in the context. When a speaker omits a component, it is on the premise that this linguistic element is present in the surrounding discourse. Similarly, readers must locate the omitted elements within the context to reconstruct the elliptical structure. Ellipsis occurs frequently in both English and Chinese, but its usage differs significantly between the two languages.

In English, ellipsis serves as a supplement to formal cohesion. As noted by Pan Wenguo (2021: 341), "English ellipsis often comes with morphological or formal markers and can be identified structurally." In contrast, "Chinese ellipsis is driven solely by the need to convey meaning. As long as the meaning is clear, ellipsis may disregard not only grammatical rules but even logical coherence, representing the extreme of parataxis" (Pan Wenguo, 2021: 347). English ellipsis relies on syntactic relationships within the context, with the omitted meaning condensed into the semantic chain. However, in translation, if the context is not considered and the text is translated literally, the implied meaning of the ellipsis may be obscured, leading to incomplete semantics and unclear information transmission in the target text.

Nominal ellipsis is particularly common in Government Work Reports, often involving the omission of nouns serving as subjects. As a result, these reports frequently feature concise subjectless sentence structures consisting only of a "predicate + object." The most frequently omitted subjects are pronouns such as "we" or "our country," which is closely related to the audience's cognitive understanding. It is widely recognized that the subject of Government Work Reports is the State Council. Even when omitted, the audience can easily infer the meaning, making it unnecessary to specify the subject repeatedly.

Example 5:

ST: 一年来, **我们**深入学习贯彻党的二十大和二十届二中全会精神, 按照党中央决策部署, 主要做了以下工作。一是加大宏观调控力度, 推动经济运行持续好转。

TT: Last year, **we** thoroughly studied and implemented the guiding principles from the 20th CPC National Congress and the Second Plenary Session of the 20th CPC Central Committee. **We** mainly carried out the following work in accordance with the decisions and plans of the Party Central Committee: 1. **We** strengthened macro regulation and promoted steady economic recovery and growth.

The explicit addition of the subject "We" to multiple instances where it was omitted in the original Chinese text is a necessary adaptation to the differences in ellipsis and textual functions between English and Chinese. In the original Chinese sentence, "(我们) 主要做了以下工作。一(我们) 是加大宏观调控力度..." ([We] mainly carried out the following tasks. First, [we] strengthened macroeconomic regulation...), the subject "我们" ("we") appears in the initial clause and is omitted in subsequent clauses due to contextual continuity. This is a typical manifestation of Chinese parataxis, aligned with the highly shared cognitive context in *Government Work Reports*, where the reporting entity (the State Council) is clearly understood by the audience. Listeners can automatically infer the omitted subject, allowing the text to remain concise, coherent, and smoothly flowing.

However, English grammar requires complete subject-predicate structures, and ellipses (such as the

omission of verbs or clauses) typically follow explicit syntactic markers. It rarely allows the frequent and flexible omission of subjects as Chinese does. Therefore, in the translation, the subject "We" is explicitly supplied in phrases such as "We mainly carried out..." and "We strengthened..." The core effect of this approach is grammatical explicitation: it transforms the "implicit" subject in Chinese, which relies on context and logical cohesion, into an "explicit" grammatical component essential to English sentence structure. This ensures that each English sentence is formally complete with a subject and predicate, achieving syntactic self-sufficiency. Not only does this align with the norms of English hypotaxis, but it also clearly identifies the agent of the actions, avoiding potential ambiguity or logical discontinuity that might arise from a literal translation of the elliptical structure.

2.4 Conjunction

Cohesive devices in a text are words or expressions with specific meanings that explicitly indicate semantic relationships between sentences. Through such devices, "readers can discern the semantic connections between sentences and even logically anticipate the meaning of subsequent sentences based on the preceding ones" (Hu Zhuanglin, 1994: 92). English is a hypotactic language and subject-prominent in structure, emphasizing explicit cohesion and precise grammatical expression. In contrast, Chinese is a paratactic language and topic-prominent, often characterized by longer sentences, fluid syntactic structures ("run-on sentences"), and a greater reliance on logical and contextual connections for coherence. This linguistic distinction typically results in English texts using more overt linking words, while Chinese tends to use fewer explicit connectors.

However, there are also many instances where logical relationships in English are not overtly marked, and the semantic connections remain implicit within the sentence structure. Therefore, when translating from English to Chinese, sentence boundaries should not be strictly based on the original text but rather on semantic relationships, including causal, temporal, sequential, and other logical connections. During translation, cohesive devices should be appropriately added, omitted, or adjusted according to the underlying semantic logic.

Example 6:

ST: 充分发挥创新主导作用，以科技创新推动产业创新，加快推进新型工业化，提高全要素生产率，不断塑造发展新动能新优势，促进社会生产力实现新的跃升。

TT: *We* should give full rein to the leading role of innovation, spur industrial innovation by making innovations in science and technology and press ahead with new industrialization, *so as to* raise total factor productivity, steadily foster new growth drivers and strengths, and promote a new leap forward in the productive forces.

Government work reports often contain long sentences composed of multiple short clauses, with little explicit connective or clear logical markers between sentences within a paragraph. While this conforms to idiomatic Chinese expression, it poses significant challenges for English translation.

The original Chinese sentence is a typical subject less construction (common in official documents), with an implied subject—"we" (the state/government/Party). The English translation explicitly adds "We"

(referring to the Chinese government or the CPC Central Committee) to clarify the agent of action, conveying a sense of proactive responsibility and commitment. This aligns with the narrative strategy of "telling China's story well" in international communication.

Similarly, "so as to" establishes a clear purpose-result relationship, indicating that the measures mentioned earlier (leveraging innovation, driving industrial advancement, promoting new industrialization) are intended to achieve the subsequent goals (enhancing total factor productivity, fostering new growth drivers, etc.). This prevents logical gaps between actions and objectives, ensuring smooth internal coherence while adhering to English conventions of using prepositional phrases to denote purpose. Such translation strategies reflect a nuanced understanding of the parataxis-hypotaxis divide between Chinese and English, adapting form while preserving meaning to produce a fluent, audience-friendly rendition.

Example 7:

ST: 在以习近平同志为代表的党中央坚强领导下,全国各族人民万众一心,克难攻坚,完成了全年经济社会发展主要目标任务,全面深化改革实现良好开局,全面推进依法治国开启新征程,全面建成小康社会又**迈出坚实步伐**。

TT: However, under the firm leadership of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China (CPC) headed by General Secretary Xi Jinping, all our people have worked together as one, surmounted difficulties, and accomplished the year's main targets for economic and social development, **thereby** ensuring that we got off to a good start in comprehensively deepening reform, embarked on a new journey to fully advance the law-based governance of China, **and** again **made solid progress in** our endeavor to finish building a moderately prosperous society in all respects.

Though lengthy, the original sentence reveals a clear logical structure upon closer analysis: "the leadership of the Party Central Committee" serves as the premise, "worked together as one, surmounted difficulties" constitutes the factual progression, while "got off to a good start, embarked on a new journey, and made solid progress in" represents the outcome. However, merely conveying the core meaning, while preserving the original content, may not adequately accommodate target-language readers. English, as a hypotactic language, relies on explicit grammatical or lexical devices to connect clauses. Thus, conjunctions such as "thereby" or "and" must be incorporated during translation to surface the implicit logical relationships.

This approach adheres to the principle of coherence—by employing grammatical connectors, the translation transcends a series of disjointed verb-object phrases and evolves into a contextually meaningful sentence in the target language. Such adaptation ensures better reception among English-speaking readers.

2.5 Lexical Cohesion

Lexical cohesion and grammatical cohesion work "hand in hand" to jointly construct the coherence of a text. As Hu Zhuanglin (1994: 112) notes, lexical cohesion refers to the semantic connections among certain words within a text, whether through repetition, substitution by other words, or co-occurrence.

Only through the relative concentration of vocabulary can the consistency of the text's theme and semantics be ensured, making the handling of lexical cohesion in the original text crucial during translation.

In English, a certain word may repeatedly appear in a text in the forms of the original word, synonyms, near-synonyms or general terms. When translating into Chinese, this would result in either repeating the same meaning or presenting multiple synonymous expressions in parallel, thereby reducing the fluency and naturalness of the translation. For such repetitive structures of synonymous expressions, translators often simplify the translation by replacing the expressions, making it conform to the expression habits of Chinese.

Example 8:

ST: 2023 过去一年, 是全面贯彻党的二十大精神**的开局之年**, 是本届政府依法履职的**第一年**。

TT: 2023 was **the first year** for fully implementing the guiding principles from the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China (CPC). It was also this government's **first year** to perform its duties in accordance with the law.

The original text also employs rich lexical co-occurrence strategies. For instance, "开局之年" (the year of beginning) and "履职第一年" (the first year of performing duties) form a temporal co-occurrence under a synonymous relationship, while "全面贯彻" (fully implement) and "依法履职" (perform duties in accordance with the law) establish cohesion within the semantic field of political actions. As a typical political-propaganda text, such expressions—repeating core temporal units like "年" (year) and political actions—are common to reinforce the central theme. In translation, I have chosen to faithfully reproduce this structural repetition to achieve equivalent rhythm and emphasis.

Furthermore, given the political discourse nature of the text, "开局之年" and "第一年" not only refer to temporal beginnings in this specific context but also carry the dual connotations of "the starting point of plan implementation" and "the starting point of responsibility fulfillment." The translation renders them as "the first year for fully implementing..." and "this government's first year to perform...", respectively. By differentiating the prepositions "for" and "to," the translation retains the core imagery of "year" while precisely distinguishing between "a year for implementing plans" and "a year to begin undertaking responsibilities." This approach aligns with English conventions of using prepositions to express logical relationships, avoids semantic ambiguity that could arise from literal equivalence, and simultaneously creates near-synonymous repetition within the working semantic network through verbs such as "implement" and "perform" in later contexts. In doing so, it constructs a coherent and rigorous conceptual framework within the official discourse system.

Example 9:

ST: 面对异常复杂的国际环境和艰巨繁重的改革发展稳定任务, 以习近平同志为核心的党中央团结带领全国各族人民, 顶住外部压力、克服内部困难, 付出艰辛努力, 新冠疫情防控实现平稳转段、取得重大决定性胜利, 全年经济社会发展主要目标任务圆满完成, 高质量发展扎实推进, 社会大局保持稳定, 全面建设社会主义现代化国家迈出坚实**步伐**。

TT: In the face of an unusually complex international environment and the challenging tasks of advancing reform and development and ensuring stability at home, the Party Central Committee with Comrade Xi Jinping at its core brought together the Chinese people of all ethnic groups and led them in withstanding external pressures and overcoming internal difficulties with dedicated efforts. We secured a smooth transition in epidemic response following a major, decisive victory in the fight against Covid-19. The main goals and tasks for economic and social development in 2023 were accomplished, and we made steady progress in pursuing high-quality development, maintained overall social stability, and made solid **advances** in building a modern socialist country in all respects.

"迈出坚实步伐" is rendered as "made solid advances," a treatment that skillfully demonstrates a lexical recurrence strategy based on textual coherence. In the original context, "步伐" does not literally refer to physical steps but, together with preceding phrases such as "扎实推进," "圆满完成," and "保持稳定," forms a metaphorical semantic field centered on the theme of "incremental developmental achievements." The translator's choice of "advances" first establishes near-synonymous recurrence with the key phrase "made steady progress" in the previous sentence of the same paragraph. The two expressions echo each other along the conceptual axis of "progress-achievements," creating a logical progression between high-quality development and modernization efforts at the textual level. Secondly, the collocation "solid advances" retains the strong imagery of "坚实" while its nominalized structure, alongside expressions such as "steady progress" and "accomplished tasks," contributes to constructing a formal stylistic atmosphere suited for objective statements of accomplishments. Ultimately, this choice avoids the stylistic dissonance that a literal metaphor might introduce. By transforming a concrete action metaphor into an abstract statement of achievement, the translation maintains the purity and coherence of the conceptual network within the macro-narrative of "responding to external pressures—achieving developmental outcomes." This achieves a high degree of unity between formal adaptation and conceptual cohesion in the translation of political discourse.

3. Conclusion

Based on the discourse cohesion theory, this paper analyzes the *2024 Government Work Report* from the perspectives of reference, substitution, ellipsis, conjunction, and lexical cohesion, and explores the role of this theory in the layout and logical relationship handling of political document translation discourse. The application of the cohesion theory helps to accurately convey the original ideas, clarify the internal logic of the discourse, and thereby improve the translation quality of political documents. This research provides specific cases for the related discussions on discourse cohesion and coherence in English-Chinese translation. However, due to the limited knowledge and translation experience of the author, the analysis of translation difficulties and strategies in the text inevitably has some deficiencies. It is hoped that this research can trigger more discussions and provide references for translation learners and practitioners when dealing with similar issues, so as to produce more accurate, fluent, naturally connected, and logically clear translations.

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