Original Paper

Research on English Translation Strategies of the 2024 Government Work Report from the Perspective of Skopos Theory

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Abstract

Against the backdrop of globalization and China's growing role in global discourse, the English translation of the 2024 Government Work Report is crucial to international understanding of its policies and image. Guided by Skopos Theory, this study analyzes the translation strategies used in the Report, examining their applicability, influencing factors, and implications. It focuses on six strategies—literal translation, free translation, omission, amplification, conversion, and explicitation—as illustrated through concrete examples. Strategy choice is shaped by extra-textual factors such as political communication objectives and readership expectations, as well as intra-textual factors like linguistic differences and terminology standardization. The findings reveal a purposeful "purpose-strategy-effect" framework that effectively adapts Chinese political discourse to English, enhancing communicative efficacy and providing insights for interdisciplinary research in political translation.

Keywords

Skopos Theory, Report on the Work of the Government, English Translation Strategies, Political Document Translation

1. Introduction

In the era of deepening globalization, the translation of political documents for international audiences has become a critical link in the international communication of national discourse. As one of China's most important annual political texts, the Government Work Report centrally demonstrates the country's policy orientations, development plans, and governance philosophy. The quality of its English

translation directly influences how the international community understands and perceives China's policies. The 2024 Government Work Report, based on the new stage of development, proposes a series of innovative and strategic deployments. How to achieve dynamic adaptation between the original Chinese meaning and English expression norms through precise selection of translation strategies has become a significant issue in the field of political communication.

Skopos Theory, the core of the German functionalist translation theory, provides a new perspective on this issue. This theory breaks away from the traditional paradigm of "faithfulness to the source text" and proposes that "the translation purpose determines the translation strategy", emphasizing that translation activities should be guided by the functional realization of the target text in the target language context. This theory is particularly applicable to the translation of political documents, which serve dual functions of information dissemination and persuasion, as it not only requires accurate transmission of policy content but also takes into account the cultural backgrounds and acceptance habits of the target audience to effectively construct a national image.

Currently, the international communication of Chinese political discourse faces two distinct challenges. First, structural differences characterize Chinese "paratactic" expressions and English "hypotactic" norms: Chinese depends on implicit logical connections and rhetorical parallel structures, whereas English prioritizes explicit grammatical indicators and clear logical presentation. Second, translating concepts unique to China—like "the Belt and Road Initiative" and "Rural Revitalization"—requires striking a balance between "cultural specificity" and "international universality" to avoid linguistic barriers that lead to policy misinterpretation. Against this backdrop, treating the English translation of the 2024 Government Work Report as the research object and conducting a systematic analysis of the application logic and driving mechanisms of its translation strategies carries considerable theoretical and practical significance.

This study aims to address the following core questions: First, how are strategies such as literal translation, free translation, omission, addition, transposition, and explicitation specifically applied in the English translation of the report to achieve dual adaptation in linguistic structure and function? Second, how do extra-textual factors (such as political communication needs, audience cognitive differences, and cultural-institutional contexts) and intra-textual factors (such as linguistic structural differences, terminology standardization requirements, and textual functional attributes) jointly influence the selection of translation strategies? Third, what theoretical value and practical pathways does the translation practice framed by Skopos Theory offer for enhancing the international communication efficacy of Chinese policies? By integrating theoretical frameworks with empirical analysis, this study aims to reveal the dynamic logic chain of "purpose orientation—strategy selection—effect realization" in political document translation, providing methodological references for optimizing the overseas communication of national discourse and helping to build a more credible and approachable image of China. Meanwhile, the research findings can be further extended to fields such as multi-modal translation and translator subjectivity, offering new directions for interdisciplinary

research on political discourse translation.

2. Literature Review

Research within China on the English translation of the Government Work Reports demonstrates a multi-faceted approach, with scholars exploring diverse perspectives. Some focus on translating the distinctive "four-character expressions"; Jia (2010), for instance, examined their functional adaptation within political contexts and strategies for achieving semantic and stylistic precision. Others investigate strategies for culturally loaded terms, with Huang (2007) emphasizing adherence to "established usage" to ensure accurate cultural concepts bridge the linguistic gap. Scholars like Lü (2011) address techniques for complex sentences, outlining strategies from a functionalist perspective to explicitly render logical relationships during Chinese-to-English sentence restructuring. Further contributions include Zhang Jian's (2013) exploration of the dialectic between "faithfulness" and "adaptiveness", while Wang (2001) earlier highlighted the need to avoid "Chinglish" in political text translation, laying crucial practical groundwork. Collectively, these studies, covering dimensions ranging from linguistic structure to cultural transmission, provide substantial theoretical and practical guidance for translating the Government Work Reports.

3. Theoretical Basis

Skopos Theory was systematically proposed and developed primarily by German translation theorists Katharina Reiss and Hans J. Vermeer in the late 1970s and 1980s. Skopos Theory overturned the traditional notion of "faithfulness to the source text" as the supreme standard, proposing instead that the highest principle of translation is to achieve the purpose (Skopos) of the translational action. The term "Skopos", derived from Greek, means "purpose, intention, or function". In translation, it refers to the intended purpose or function that a specific translation task or the target text is expected to fulfill in the target context.

The core tenets of Skopos Theory include that translation is a purposeful human action: it is not a language conversion occurring in a vacuum, but a human-initiated action taking place within a specific sociocultural context to meet particular needs. Furthermore, the purpose determines the translation strategy ("The end justifies the means"): all decisions during the translation process (such as text selection, translation strategy, stylistic choices, and detailed handling) should be determined by the purpose (Skopos) that the target text is expected to achieve in the target culture, rather than by the source text itself or its formal features. Additionally, the target text is an independent text: it is an independent new text (Offer of Information) produced for the target audience in the target context, needing to function effectively within the target culture and meet the client's requirements. Finally, the theory emphasizes the changed status of the source text: it is no longer the sacred and inviolable sole standard; instead, it is regarded as a "Source of Offer" provided by the client, and the translator decides how to extract and reorganize information from this source based on the translation purpose

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(Kornienko, 2020).

Vermeer's Skopos Theory encompasses three core rules. The Skopos Rule is the highest principle of translation, emphasizing that the translational action is determined by its intended purpose. All strategic choices (e.g., text handling, linguistic style) serve to achieve a specific function (such as informing or persuading) in the target context. The Coherence Rule (Intratextual Coherence) states that the target text must make sense and be comprehensible to the target recipients within their cultural context. The target text must conform to target language conventions and cultural norms, forming an independent text with internal logical consistency. The Fidelity Rule (Intertextual Coherence) refers to the need for the target text to maintain a dynamic relationship with the source text. However, the degree and form of "fidelity" depend entirely on the translation purpose (e.g., legal translations require high proximity to the source, while advertisements allow substantial adaptation). When in conflict with the Coherence Rule, ensuring the target text's acceptability usually takes precedence.

4. Analysis of English Translation Strategies in the 2024 GWR from the Perspective of Skopos Theory

As one of China's most authoritative annual political documents, the 2024 Government Work Report (with both Chinese and English versions translated by the Central Institute of Party History and Literature) serves as a comprehensive summary of national governance achievements and a clear blueprint for future development.

The report first offers a systematic review of China's performance in 2023, a year marked by pivotal progress across multiple fronts. Notably, it emphasizes the smooth transition in COVID-19 epidemic response following a major, decisive victory in pandemic control—laying a solid foundation for overall social stability. Economically, the nation achieved a steady recovery, with key indicators meeting annual targets, while significant headway was made in advancing a modernized industrial system. Breakthroughs in scientific and technological innovation further boosted development momentum, complemented by deeper reforms and expanded opening-up that enhanced the business environment. Additionally, the report highlights strengthened foundations for secure development, steady improvements in ecological quality, and effective safeguards for people's wellbeing, all of which underscored solid strides toward building a modern socialist country.

Turning to 2024, the report clarifies the overarching development requirements and policy orientations, guided by Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era. It sets specific projected targets, including around 5% GDP growth, over 12 million new urban jobs, a surveyed urban unemployment rate of approximately 5.5%, and a continued 2.5% drop in energy consumption per unit of GDP. Beyond these targets, the report details ten core tasks to drive high-quality development: advancing the modern industrial system and new quality productive forces; implementing the strategy of invigorating China through science and education; expanding domestic demand; deepening reforms; promoting high-standard opening-up; balancing development and security; strengthening work on

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agriculture, rural areas, and rural residents; advancing coordinated urban-rural and regional development; enhancing ecological conservation; and safeguarding people's wellbeing. It also addresses critical areas such as government capacity building, ethnic unity, national defense, Hong Kong-Macao-Taiwan region affairs, and major-country diplomacy with Chinese characteristics, presenting a holistic vision for advancing national rejuvenation through Chinese modernization (Becker, 1981).

4.1 Literal Translation

Literal translation strictly adheres to the original text's linguistic structure and vocabulary, maintaining consistency in both form and content. In political discourse, literal translation ensures accuracy and authority in official expressions, avoiding semantic deviations or politically sensitive issues that might arise from flexible interpretations. Since political texts often involve state policies, laws, and important political concepts, literal translation helps maintain textual rigor and consistency while ensuring standardized translations of key terms gain broad recognition. However, over-reliance on literal translation may make the text appear rigid, so while preserving core information, other translation strategies may sometimes be needed to improve readability.

ST1: 新冠疫情防控实现平稳转段、取得重大决定性胜利。

TT1: We secured a smooth transition in epidemic response following a major, decisive victory in the fight against Covid-19.

The translation renders "新冠疫情防控" as "epidemic response", directly preserving the governance scope of "防控" (prevention and control). "平稳转段" and "重大决定性胜利" are respectively translated as "smooth transition" and "major, decisive victory", adopting standardized expressions in English governmental texts for describing public health events, ensuring zero semantic loss of the core message that "epidemic prevention and control achieved phased success". It also maintains the explicit continuity of logical relations. The Chinese parallel structure "实现……、取得……" is transformed into a temporal sequence in English using the preposition "following", aligning with the narrative order of the original Chinese sentence while making the causal relationship between "victory" and "transition" explicit through English "hypotaxis" grammar. This allows international readers to intuitively grasp the complete progression of China's epidemic response from "concluding with victory" to "achieving a smooth transition".

4.2 Free Translation

Free translation focuses on conveying the core ideas and essence of the original text rather than adhering strictly to literal expressions. It is particularly suitable for texts rich in cultural characteristics or rhetorical devices. In political discourse, free translation makes the target text more aligned with the expressive norms of the target language, enhancing readability and dissemination effectiveness, especially for slogans, metaphors, or symbolic expressions. The advantage of free translation lies in making the language more natural and fluent, facilitating reader comprehension. However, caution is needed to avoid excessive interpretation that may deviate from the original meaning. For principled

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statements, literal translation should still be prioritized to ensure accurate transmission of political information.

ST2: 着力抓好民生保障，推进社会事业发展。

TT2: We made every effort to ensure public well-being and advanced the development of social programs.

The translation adopts a target-language-oriented approach. The Chinese phrase "着力抓好" is rendered as "made every effort to", employing an English expression that conveys strong policy implementation while avoiding the awkwardness of literal translation. "民生保障" is translated as "public wellbeing", distilling the comprehensive Chinese concept into internationally recognized terminology that captures the essence of livelihood security. The translation maintains functional equivalence by using natural English verb phrases to express policy determination, selecting globally comprehensible terms for governance concepts and structuring the sentence to flow naturally in English while preserving the original's policy intent. This approach successfully bridges linguistic and cultural gaps, accurately conveying the dual policy objectives of ensuring people's welfare and promoting social development, while meeting the functional requirements of government work reports in international communication contexts.

4.3 Omission

Omission refers to the exclusion of redundant or repetitive information during translation to make the target text more concise. Political discourse often employs parallel structures or repetition for emphasis, but in languages like English, excessive repetition may appear wordy. Omission optimizes the efficiency of expression, making the translation more consistent with the logic and conventions of the target language while retaining core content. In political texts, omission is mostly applied to decorative phrases or non-critical information, though completeness must be ensured for important policies or principled statements. The advantage of omission is improving the conciseness of the translation and avoiding lengthy expressions that may hinder readability.

ST3: 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。

TT3: 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.

The translation achieves multiple objectives through omission. Firstly, the temporal phrase "一年来" is omitted, with "Last year" directly and concisely conveying the time reference in line with English expression norms. Secondly, the term "精神" is implicitly rendered through "guiding principles", avoiding redundant translation while preserving meaning. Finally, the phrase "按照……部署" is streamlined to "in accordance with the decisions and plans", omitting repetitive semantic elements of "部署" to highlight the core action "carried out the following work". This strategy prioritizes efficient

comprehension for target-language readers by eliminating redundant rhetorical elements from the Chinese original. It ensures the translation maintains policy gravitas in formal contexts while adhering to the concise characteristics of English governmental texts, achieving a balance between "accurate information delivery" and "economy of expression".

4.4 Addition

Addition involves supplementing necessary background information, explanations, or logical connectors in the translation to bridge gaps caused by linguistic or cultural differences. Political discourse often contains uniquely Chinese political concepts or terms that may be difficult for foreign readers to understand if translated directly. Addition provides essential context, enhancing the readability and acceptability of the translation. Additionally, Chinese tends to use implicit logic, while languages like English prefer explicit connections. Addition helps construct clearer logical relationships. Its advantage lies in making the translation more complete and understandable, but care must be taken to ensure the objectivity and accuracy of supplementary content, avoiding subjective interpretations.

ST4: 坚持不懈抓好"三农"工作，扎实推进乡村全面振兴。

TT4: Making sustained efforts to deliver a good performance in work relating to agriculture, rural areas, and rural residents and taking solid steps to advance rural revitalization.

The translation achieves multiple objectives through Addition. Firstly, the addition of "relating to" clarifies the specific scope of the "三农" (agriculture, rural areas, and rural residents), eliminating potential confusion around this China-specific term. Secondly, the conjunction "and" explicitly connects "delivering good performance" with "advancing revitalization", conforming to English hypotactic conventions. Finally, the amplified adjectives "sustained" and "solid" reinforce the continuity and substantial nature of policy implementation, aligning with English governmental texts' preference for adjectival modification of verbal actions. This strategy ensures accurate transmission of policy intent while meeting the core requirements of government work report translation: authoritative precision and functional equivalence. The translation maintains the original's policy weight while adapting to English linguistic norms for optimal international comprehension.

4.5 Transposition

Transposition involves adjusting parts of speech, voice, or sentence structures to make the translation more aligned with the expressive norms of the target language. In Chinese political discourse, active voice and subjectless sentences are common, while languages like English tend to favor passive voice and complete subject-predicate structures. Thus, transposition optimizes the grammar and style of the translation, making it more natural and fluent. Furthermore, Chinese is rich in verbs, whereas English often uses nominalized expressions. Transposition helps achieve more idiomatic target-language expressions. Its advantage is enhancing the professionalism and readability of the translation, but it must ensure that the adjusted semantics do not deviate from the original meaning, accurately conveying the political intent of the source text.

ST5: 推动高质量共建"一带一路"走深走实。

TT5: We will deepen high-quality Belt and Road cooperation and achieve solid results.

In the translation, "推动高质量共建" is transformed into "deepen high-quality...cooperation". The English word "deepen" which expresses a continuous action is used to replace "推动" (promote), and the connotation of "共建" (joint construction) is made explicit through "cooperation", which conforms to the international community's understanding of the cooperative nature of the Belt and Road Initiative. For "走深走实", the literal metaphor is abandoned and translated as "achieve solid results", converting the process-oriented expression in Chinese into a result-oriented expression in English, which is in line with the effect-oriented expression habit of English government texts. This transformation strategy retains the core elements of the initiative (high quality, deepened cooperation, practical results), and reconstructs the semantic meaning with the "verb-object plus result" structure familiar to target language readers. It avoids the stiffness of literal translation and prevents the excessive domestication of free translation, achieving a balance between the accurate transmission of policy concepts and international communication effects. It reflects the principle of the Skopos Theory, which is guided by the acceptability of the target language and dynamically adjusts translation strategies.

4.6 Explicitation

Explicitation conveys deeper meanings by appropriately explaining or expanding upon the original text while preserving its core message. In political discourse, Explicitation is often used for concepts with specific cultural backgrounds or complex political connotations, enabling target readers to accurately understand their underlying logic and intent. Unlike literal translation, Explicitation not only conveys surface meaning but also supplements necessary background information or logical connections to prevent misunderstandings caused by cultural differences. For instance, uniquely Chinese political terms often require explanations tied to specific policy contexts to ensure translations remain faithful to the original while aligning with the cognitive habits of the target language. The advantage of Explicitation is enhancing clarity and persuasiveness, particularly in international communication where cultural barriers need to be overcome. However, explanations must remain objective to avoid over-extension or subjective interpretations.

ST6: 积极的财政政策要适度加力、提质增效。

TT6: We should appropriately enhance the intensity of our proactive fiscal policy and improve its quality and effectiveness.

Explicitation serves multiple purposes in this translation. For one thing, adding "the intensity of" explicitly clarifies the aspect in which proactive fiscal policy should be strengthened, thereby concretizing the abstract concept of "适度加力" (appropriately enhancing efforts) from the source text. For another, the structure "enhance... and improve..." clearly distinguishes and articulates the two dimensions of the policy requirement—"适度加力" (enhancing intensity) and "提质增效" (improving quality and effectiveness)—which are concisely merged in the Chinese version, aligning with English's

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inclination toward explicit logical division. Additionally, incorporating these elements ensures the policy's operational focus is unambiguous, meeting the demand for precision in English governmental discourse. This approach accurately conveys the policy's intent while adapting to English linguistic norms, preserving the original's authoritative tone and facilitating effective international communication of the fiscal policy direction.

5. Analysis of Motivations of Translation Strategy Choices

5.1 Extra-textual Factors

The core objective of translating the Government Work Report into English, representing its political communication purpose, is to accurately convey China's policy concepts to the international community and shape the national image (Chen, 2018); for instance, when dealing with strategic expressions with Chinese characteristics such as "the Belt and Road Initiative" and "rural revitalization", translation strategies must balance "cultural specificity" and "international acceptability" to avoid misinterpretation of policies due to linguistic barriers. Furthermore, audience cognitive differences must be considered, as the target audience is primarily international readers whose cultural backgrounds, political systems, and linguistic habits differ significantly from the Chinese context; consequently, localized concepts such as "三农" (three rural issues) require explicit translation, such as supplementing the explanation "agriculture, rural areas, and rural residents", to lower the threshold for understanding and ensure the effective conveyance of policy connotations. Additionally, the cultural and institutional context plays a crucial role, as English political texts emphasize logical explicitness and linguistic conciseness, while Chinese places greater emphasis on rhetorical parallelism and policy solemnity; for example, the parallel structure of "实现……、取得……" (achieve..., obtain...) in the Chinese original is transformed into a temporal sequence through English "hypotaxis" grammar, such as using "following", to align with the cognitive habits of target-language readers.

5.2 Intra-textual Factor

Regarding linguistic structure differences, there are fundamental differences in grammatical structures between Chinese and English: Chinese emphasizes parataxis, where logical relationships are implicit in the arrangement of words, while English emphasizes hypotaxis, requiring explicit markers such as conjunctions and prepositions to convey logic; for example, when translating "坚持不懈抓好'三农'工作" as "Making sustained efforts to deliver a good performance...", the addition of "relating to" clarifies the scope of "三农" (agriculture, rural areas, and rural residents), and the use of "and" to connect parallel actions both demonstrate adaptations to the hypotactic features of English. Furthermore, terminology standardization is crucial, as the accuracy of political terminology directly affects the authority of translations; expressions such as "新冠疫情防控" (COVID-19 epidemic prevention and control) and "高质量发展" (high-quality development) in the report must adopt internationally accepted translations (such as "epidemic response" and "high-quality development") to

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ensure terminological consistency and the solemnity of policies. Additionally, the cultural and institutional context must be considered, given that the Government Work Report is a "combination of informative and vocative texts", requiring both accurate information transmission and linguistic strategies to enhance international audiences' recognition of Chinese policies; for instance, translating "着力抓好民生保障" as "made every effort to ensure public well-being" uses "made every effort" to strengthen the perceived intensity of policy implementation, aligning with the "action-oriented" expressive conventions of English political texts.

6. Conclusion

This research takes Skopos Theory from the German functionalist translation theory as the theoretical framework, focuses on the English translation practice of the 2024 Government Work Report of the People's Republic of China, and systematically discusses the application logic, motivations, and significance for the international communication of Chinese policies of its translation strategies.

The study points out that the English translation of the report achieves dynamic adaptation between the "paratactic" structure of the Chinese original and the "hypotactic" norms of English through strategies such as literal translation, free translation, omission, addition, transposition, and explicitation. For example, the phrase "新冠疫情防控实现平稳转段" (We secured a smooth transition in epidemic response) is translated literally, using standardized expressions like "epidemic response" and "smooth transition" to ensure the accurate transmission of policy concepts. The expression "着力抓好民生保障" (We made every effort to ensure public well-being) is translated freely to avoid the awkwardness of literal translation and fit English expression habits. The omission strategy is used to delete redundant rhetoric in Chinese (such as the function words "来" and "精神"), while the addition strategy strengthens the "hypotactic" features of English by supplementing logical connectives (such as "and" and "relating to"). For Chinese-specific concepts like "一带一路" (Belt and Road Initiative) and "三农" (agriculture, rural areas, and rural residents), the transposition and explicitation strategies are adopted, such as converting "推动高质量共建" (promote high-quality joint construction) into "deepen high-quality cooperation" through part-of-speech transformation and decomposing "三农" into "agriculture, rural areas, and rural residents" to enhance the understanding of international audiences.

From the perspective of Skopos Theory, the selection of translation strategies is jointly driven by extra-textual and intra-textual factors. Extra-textual factors encompass political communication needs, audience cognitive differences, and cultural as well as institutional contexts. Political communication needs center on objectives like national image shaping; audience cognitive differences refer to variations in cultural backgrounds and linguistic habits; cultural and institutional contexts involve demands such as the emphasis on logical explicitness in English political texts. Intra-textual factors include linguistic structural differences, terminology standardization, and textual functional attributes. Linguistic structural differences manifest in the contrast between Chinese parataxis and English hypotaxis; terminology standardization focuses on the adoption of internationally accepted translations

for specific terms, including the rendering of "高质量发展" as "high-quality development"; textual functional attributes combine informative and image-constructing roles. The core goal of this strategy selection process is to enhance the overseas accessibility and acceptability of Chinese policies by achieving functional adaptation of the target texts.

The study holds that Skopos Theory provides a "communication-effect-oriented" theoretical reference for the translation of political documents. In the future, research can be further expanded to areas such as multimodal translation (such as cross-media communication of report charts and videos) and analysis of translator subjectivity (such as strategic preferences of different translation teams). It is also recommended to construct a "Chinese Political Discourse Translation Evaluation Model" that integrates indicators such as international media citation rates and audience comprehension to deepen the practical guiding value of research in this field.

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