



# On Translation of *Report on the Work of the Government 2023* from the Perspective of Skopos Theory

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## Abstract

*The Report on the Work of the Government covers all aspects of China's politics and livelihood, and has become an authoritative source of information for domestic and foreign communities to understand China's national development as well as its policies. Therefore, the translation of RWG is of great importance. This paper introduces the Skopos Theory and discusses its applicability to RWG. Taking the 2023 RWG as an example, it further discusses its stylistic features and translation strategies from lexical, syntactic and rhetorical perspectives. These skills are of great practical importance in the translation of RWG, making the translation more readable and comprehensible, and can be used for other similar political reports.*

## I. INTRODUCTION

As China's international status continues to rise, its development has attracted the world's attention, bringing lots of development in higher education (Yan et al, 2023a; Yan & Howard, 2019; Yan & Li, 2023; Zheng et al, 2018a; Yan et al, 2018a). As *the Report on the Work of the Government* (RWG) is a summary of the government's work in the last year, and the planning and deployment of the government's work in the coming year, its content includes politics, economy, people's livelihood, national defense, etc. It is one of the most authoritative sources of information on China's situation and policies (Ding & Yan, 2023; Mao & Yan, 2024; Yan et al, 2018b; Yan et al, 2020; Yan & Sun, 2022; Yan et al, 2023b; Zheng et al, 2019; Zheng et al, 2018b). Therefore, the translation of RWG is very important, but at the same time, its translation is very

difficult. First of all, the government report is highly policy-oriented, so even the smallest mistake could have an impact on national interests. Second, with the appearance of lots of new expressions and concepts with Chinese features, it is hard for translators to find their equivalents in English. Third, the differences between the historical and cultural backgrounds of the East and the West, as well as the differences in English and Chinese language habits, also make it difficult to translate (Li, 2010: 85). Due to the difficulties in translation of RWG, the exploration of translation strategies makes sense, which can be used in similar texts and makes the translated version more natural and understandable.

The German Skopos Theory originated in the late 1970s. This theory broke through the limitations of equivalence, and emphasized the purpose of translation and

the function of the text, which brought a new revolution to the field of translation. The Skopos Theory regards that translation is a cross-cultural communication with specific purposes, and the translation purpose plays a decisive role in the whole translation process. The development of the Skopos Theory has roughly three stages. The first stage is the origin of the theory. The text typology and translation criticism mode were proposed by Katharina Reiss. The second stage is the formal establishment of this theory. Vermeer broke away from the traditional view of translation centered on the original language and gave a new elaboration on the nature of translation. He proposed that translation is a human activity with a purpose. The third stage is the further development of this theory, marked by Nord's "function-plus-loyalty" theory. She proposed the principle of "loyalty" in response to the shortcomings of the this theory, which complements and improves the purposive theory. This theory gives the translator more freedom and makes the translation activity more flexible, which has a strong explanatory power and guiding effect on translation.

This paper takes RWG as the object of study and tries to apply Skopos theory to the Chinese-English translation of RWG. RWG belongs to informative texts, which carries certain purposes and functions. Because the Skopos Theory pays much attention to "skopos", and it gives translators much freedom to choose appropriate translation methods, it is reasonable to say this theory is applicable to RWG. Taking the 2023 GWR as specific case study, the author explores the stylistic features of the 2023 GWR and its English translation strategies from the lexical, syntactic and rhetorical levels, aiming to provide some ideas and methods for the translation of other similar government reports.

## II. APPLICATION OF SKOPOS THEORY TO THE TRANSLATION OF RWG

### 2.1 A Brief Introduction to the Skopos Theory

Skopos theory is the kernel theory of German

functionalist translation theory, which has gone through three main stages.

In the first stage, Katharine Reiss (2006) put forward in her book *Translation Criticism-The Potentials and Limitations*, that a functional category should be introduced into criticism of translation. Later, Reiss classified texts into three main types: the informative text, the expressive text and the operative text, and advocated using different translation methods for different text types. Thus, a foundation has been laid for the development of Skopos theory.

In the second stage, Vermeer proposed the Skopos theory, holding that translation is not only a linguistic process but also a human behavior with certain purposes. He put forward that Skopos theory has three rules: skopos rule, coherence rule, and fidelity rule. Skopos rule is the first important rule, which means that the translation method adopted depends on the translation purpose to be achieved. Coherence rule requires that translation activities should consider the acceptability and readability of the translated text for the readers of the translated language, and the translation has meaning in the communicative environment of the target language. Fidelity rule requires that the translated text should maintain a certain relationship with the original text. It doesn't demand that the translator be consistent with the original text in both structural and syntactic aspects. Instead, it is suggested that the translator begin with the purpose of translation, identify the connection between the original and translated texts, and make the translation faithful to the original text. The degree of fidelity is determined by the purpose of the translation and the translator's comprehension of the source text.

In the third stage, Nord (2001) in her book *Translating As a Purposeful Activity-Functionalist Approaches Explained*, provided a systematic discussion of functionalist translation theory. She described the internal and external factors that may influence the analysis of source texts and discusses how to specify translation strategies according to

the function of the original text to achieve the desired translation purpose. She also proposed the loyalty principle, which demands the translator takes responsibility for all participants in the process of translation, including respecting the original author and coordinating the intentions of the client and the target language readers.

To sum up, the Skopos Theory proposed by German scholars represented by Reiss, Vermeer and Nord is different from other translation theories. It believes that translation is a purposeful activity. It focuses not on the equivalence between the translation and the source text, but emphasizing that the translation, based on the analysis of the source text, centers on the target audience to achieve the purpose of the translation and the specific function of the text. The choice of translation strategy or method should be determined by the translation purpose.

## 2.2 Analysis of RWG Guided by the Skopos Theory

RWG, as a political document, summarizes the work of the Chinese government over the last year on the one hand, and makes plans for the work of the new year on the other hand. The main purpose of the translation of RWG is to help foreign readers better understand China, and to build an advantageous environment for the development of China. In terms of its function, RWG is a direct channel and authoritative source for people at home and abroad to have a general understanding of China's current national situation and future development direction. Obviously, RWG is an informative text. Informative texts has a clear purpose, that is, to accurately convey the information. This is precisely what Skopes theory emphasizes, that is translation is a purposeful activity, based on the analysis of the purpose of translation and the original text, aiming to achieve the function of the source text. Therefore, we can say that Skopes theory has a very close relationship with informative writing and has a guiding meaning for it.

Although it is true that the C-E translation of authoritative RWG has high requirements for accuracy, and the translator should keep the translation as faithful as

possible to the original, the pursuit of faithfulness usually results in slavish or even unreadable translation because of the cultural and linguistic differences between these two languages, thus failing to facilitate the understanding of China. So in this case, the translator needs to flexibly adopt translation methods from the perspective of the target readers and the intended functions of the translation, which is consistent with the Skopos Theory. The Skopes theory shakes the supremacy of the source text and degrades it to the status of a provider of information, and accordingly, the focus of the translation shifts to the realization of the purpose of translation. Therefore, it makes more sense for translators to flexibly choose proper translation methods for particular translation purposes and functions, rather than pursuing absolute fidelity to the original text. In this sense, it is justifiable to say that the translation of RWG can get some direct guidance from the Skopos theory, which allows translators to have greater flexibility in their translation process.

To sum up, the Skopos Theory is applicable to RWG, which can enable the foreign readers not only to understand the report, but also to promote cross-cultural exchanges.

## III. STYLISTIC FEATURES OF THE 2023 GWR AND ITS TRANSLATION STRATEGY

### 3.1 Lexical Features and Translation Strategies of RWG

#### 3.1.1 Translation of Repetitive Words

Repetition means mentioning the same thing more than twice in a sentence or a short paragraph. The English and Chinese languages have different tendencies to use repetition, with English avoiding repetition and Chinese accustomed to it. Repetitive words are common in RWG, which is consistent with the Chinese conventions. Therefore, while translating the Report, the translator should take a flexible approach to avoid excessive repetition. The author concludes two methods to deal with repetition in the Report:

omission and substitution. For example:

E.g.1 接续推进世界一流大学和一流学科建设。

译: We continued to develop world-class universities and world-class disciplines.

In this sentence, the word “一流” is repeated two times, but the translated version only uses one “world-class”, with the second one omitted. This omission does not affect the reader's understanding. On the contrary, it makes the translation more concise and in line with the English syntactic reading conventions. Omission is a typical translation skill for repeated words, and by adopting it, the rule of coherence is achieved.

E.g.2 优先安排小微企业, 对小微企业的存量留抵税额于6月底前一次性全部退还。

译: We will give priority to micro and small enterprises, refunding outstanding VAT credits to them in one lump sum by the end of June.

In this example, “小微企业” appears two times, and in order to avoid repetition, the translated version uses “them” to substitute the second “micro and small enterprises”, which not only accurately expresses the true meaning of the original text, but also renders the translated text more readable and natural. Following the coherence rule, the substitution can make translation consistent with the convention usage of the target language.

### 3.1.2 Translation of Words with Chinese Characteristics

RWG contains many words with Chinese characteristics. While translating these words, the translator needs to understand their true meanings and translate them into English accurately. In translating words with Chinese characteristics, the author summarizes two translation skills: free translation and literal translation. For example:

E.g.1 统筹推进西部大开发、东北全面振兴。

译: We took coordinated steps to promote large-scale development of the western region and the full revitalization

of northeast China.

In this example, as the meanings of “西部大开发” and “东北振兴” are simple and obvious, the translator can literally translate them into “large-scale development of the western region” and “the revitalization of northeast China”. In these two cases, by adopting literal translation, foreign readers can understand the meaning of China's policy, and fidelity rule is followed.

E.g.2 信访

译: public complaint cases

E.g.3 4.56 亿亩。

译: 30.4 million hectares.

In these two examples, “亩” and “信访” cannot be translated exactly according to their literal meanings, for it will cause confusion among the readers and fail to achieve the communicative function and intended purpose of the translation. “亩” is a Chinese unit of land area, and is not used abroad. It cannot be directly translated as “mu”, otherwise it will not convey the message of the original text to the English readers. Since the internationally accepted unit of land area is hectare, the translator needs to convert it into 6.67 million hectares to help the English readers understand the amount of land area. The word “信访” is a unique Chinese term. Officially, the term means those who complain to the authorities by way of a visit or a letter. Thus, the translator translates it into “handling public complaints”. In these two cases, considering the words containing implicit cultural information and foreign readers' lack of cultural background, the translator adopts free translation to ensure that the translated text can be easily understood by the target audience, and Skopos rule is adhered.

## 3.2 Syntactic Features and Translation Strategies of RWG

### 3.2.1 Translation of Sentences without Subject

Sentences without subjects are abundant in the Report. This is a very common grammatical phenomenon in Chinese for Chinese grammar is usually implicit and

context-dependent. As long as the relevant context is sufficient for the reader to identify the subject, usually the subject does not appear in the sentence. In contrast, English requires explicit grammar. The subject is essential to a complete, grammatical sentence unless it is an imperative, and English usually follows the strict form of SVO or SP. Therefore, the translator should carefully handle non-subjective sentence. A direct translation without adjusting the syntactic form is obviously not feasible, because the target readers will not accept what is ungrammatical for them. We know that for a translation, as implied by Skopos theory, acceptability is very important for the realization of its skopos. In translating the sentences without subject, the author concludes two methods: adding a subject and using a passive construction. For example:

E.g.1 持续推进以人为核心的新型城镇化。

译: We continued to advance people-centered new urbanization.

Since RWG is about the achievements and plans of the government, "the government" is naturally the executor of the action. Instead of adding "the government" as the subject, it is more appropriate to choose "we" because it can show that the government is closely related to the people. Considering the characteristics of the English language, the translator uses the skills of supplementing the subject, which conveys a clearer and more coherent meaning in the translated version. The above example adhere to the rule of coherence.

E.g.2 加快实施“十四五”重大工程

译: Implementation of major projects set out in the 14th Five-Year Plan will be sped up.

As the key information of this example is its object, the translator uses the passive voice to turn this object into the subject in the translated version. Using passive voice can effectively translate Chinese non-subject sentences into complete and grammatically correct English sentences and the coherence rule is also followed.

### 3.2.2 Translation of Long Sentences

The sentences of the Report are long, mostly using parallel phrases or parallel predicates. In these sentences, connecting elements are not used much, and the sentence level is not so obvious, so they are loose in structure and implicit in logic. According to Jia Wenbo, Chinese sentence is parataxis language and is described as "bamboo-shaped" linear structure, while English sentence is hypotaxis language and is perceived as a "tree" structure. That is to say, clauses are arranged in parallel in Chinese sentences. The grammatical elements that indicate the semantic relationships among the clauses are hidden in the linear structure. In contrast, in English, linguistic signs are explicitly marked to indicate the connection of the parts of the sentence. As a result, the logic and cohesion of English sentences are clearer than in Chinese.

Owing to the difference in syntactic features, the translator should have a deep understanding of the original text and explore the logical relationships between sentences. In this way, the skopos of rendering clear and readable information to target audience can be better fulfilled. The author finds that translation of clauses into coordinate structures is an appropriate method. For example:

E.g.1 建立实施房地产长效机制, 扩大保障性住房供给, 推进长租房市场建设。

译: We established long-term mechanisms in the real estate market, expanded the supply of government-subsidized housing, and developed the long-term rental market.

In this example, the Chinese sentence contains three clauses which are all about the work that the government has done. Therefore, the translator translates these clauses into coordinate structure and make them share the same subject "we", which follows the coherence rule. In conclusion, if the logical relationship between the clauses is paratactic, we can arrange them into a coordinate structure.



### 3.3 Rhetorical Features and Translation Strategies of RWG

#### 3.3.1 Translation of Parallelism

In the Report, there are a lot of parallel sentences, which can not only make the sentences more aesthetic and powerful, but also enhance the attractiveness and influence. According to the Skopos theory, the same effects should be achieved in the translation. Therefore, the translator can adopt literal translation to translate parallel sentences in the same or similar form.

E.g.1 这些年我国发展取得的成就，是以习近平同志为核心的党中央坚强领导的结果，是习近平新时代中国特色社会主义思想科学指引的结果，是全党全军全国各族人民团结奋斗的结果。

译：We owe our achievements in these five years to the strong leadership of the Party Central Committee with Comrade Xi Jinping at its core, the sound guidance of Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era, and the concerted efforts of the whole Party, the armed forces, and Chinese people of all ethnic groups.

In the above example, “的结果” appears three times, which emphasizes the reasons for our achievements. The translator transforms them into English parallel sentences by adopting “owe to” and omitting “owe” in the later two clause, which ensures the fluency and smoothness of the English translation and proves the applicability of the coherence rule.

#### 3.3.2 Translation of Metaphor

In order to make the Report more vividly and facilitate the Chinese readers to understand the Report, there appear a number of metaphoric sentences in the report. In dealing with these metaphor, the translator can adopt free translation and literal translation. For example:

E.g.1 减税降费也放水养鱼。

译：Tax cuts and fee reductions nurtured business growth.

E.g.2 对脱贫难度大的县和村挂牌督战。

译：We placed counties and villages facing difficulty in poverty alleviation under special supervision to ensure that they met poverty alleviation targets.

In the first example, “放水养鱼” is a metaphor, which compares tax cuts to water and enterprises to fish. It vividly shows that tax reduction is a good and feasible way to invigorate enterprises. But in translation, the translator doesn't retain this metaphor, instead translating the underlying meaning of this expression. In this way, the English readers can have a better understating of this sentence, which achieves skopos rule to accurately convey China's policy.

In the second example, “挂牌督战” is a metaphor for concentrating efforts to conquer the last bastion of poverty, so as to ensure that the battle against poverty is fully won on schedule. If the translator translates literally, the target readers will be confused. Therefore, the translator adopts the method of free translation, which makes the translation easier to be accepted by the target audience and also follows the skopos theory.

E.g.3 让军政军民团结坚如磐石。

译：The unity between the military and government and between the military and the people will remain rock solid.

For the rock is solid, the Report uses “坚如磐石” to metaphorically refers to unity as stone. In this translation, the translator retains this metaphor of rock, making “solid unity” more vividly and preserves the fidelity rule.

## IV. CONCLUSION

In today's highly globalized world, China, as the largest developing country in the world, will receive more and more attention from the outside world. RWG plays a significant role in China's foreign publicity, and the quality of its translation is directly related to image-building of China in the world and other countries' understanding of China. However, because of huge differences in culture and

language between Chinese and West, it is never an easy work to produce an ideal translation. In this paper, the author introduces the Skopos theory, whose main idea is that the translated text depends on the purpose of translation. Then, the author finds that this theory is applicable to the translation of RWG in 2023, whose main purpose is to convey information of Chinese policies. Guided by the Scopes theory, the authors also concludes feasible and appropriate strategies at the lexical, syntactic, and rhetorical levels. More specifically, the translator adopts the skills of substitution and diversification while translating words; the translator uses the skills of using passive sentences and adding a subject etc when translating sentences; the translator also adopts the skills of literal translation and free translation when translating rhetorical devices of parallelism and metaphor. In the author's view, these feasible strategies can also be applied to similar government documents.

In modern China, as a translator engaged in the translation of political essays, in order to achieve the translation purpose and communicative function of the translated text, he or she should accurately understand the original text and being as faithful as possible to the original text, fully take the target readers into consideration and adopt appropriate translation strategies.

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