

# Translation of Featured Words in 2019 Government Work Report from the Perspective of Skopos Theory

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**Abstract:** Due to the development of China, more and more people have come to know about Chinese politics and culture. The *Government Work Report* is an authoritative document published by the Chinese government, which has been translated into English for international audiences. To ensure that the *Government Work Report* can be well understood by international audiences, we studied the translation of featured words in the *2019 Government Work Report* from the perspective of Skopos theory. The report is analyzed from the perspective of literal translation and free translation based on the Skopos theory. Under the guidance of Skopos theory, the *2019 Government Work Report* can be translated using literal translation and free translation techniques. At the same time, the translation of featured words using Skopos theory provides a more accurate expression of the original meaning of the *Government Work Reports*. By doing so, the communicative function of the translated text can also be achieved.

**Keywords:** Skopos theory; Featured word; *Government Work Report*; Translation

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## 1. Introduction

China has become increasingly known to global audiences in recent years due to its vast improvement in many areas. The annual *Government Work Report*, published by the State Council every year, is a comprehensive introduction to Chinese policies and their latest status. The *Government Work Report* allows international audiences to understand more about the situation and life in China. However, it includes many featured words.

Skopos theory, which was developed in Germany in the 1970s and 1980s, is a functionalist theory that holds that translation is a purposeful action that includes all elements of intercultural communication <sup>[1]</sup>. Translators can use the translation strategies suitable to the source material to express its purpose so that readers can have a better understanding of the material. Therefore, this paper uses Skopos theory to analyze the featured words in the *2019 Government Work Report*.

## 2. Introduction to Skopos theory

Skopos theory, as outlined in the book *A Skopos Theory of Translation*, is a specialized concept within translation studies. It operates on the principle that translation is purposeful and employs this idea to determine appropriate translation strategies. This theory is guided by three principles: the Skopos rule, the coherence rule, and the fidelity rule. Among these, the Skopos rule holds primary importance, followed by the coherence rule, with the fidelity rule considered of lesser significance<sup>[3]</sup>. This means that all three principles serve the primary goal of the Skopos rule. The primary focus during the translation process is on understanding the author's intent. Human translators must prioritize the author's purpose when selecting translation strategies and methods. Subsequently, readers should receive the same intended purpose from the translators, resulting in a successful translation.

### 2.2.1. The Skopos rule

The Skopos rule, the first principle in translation, is essentially the overarching purpose of the entire translation process<sup>[4]</sup>. It operates on the idea that the end goal justifies the means. In other words, every step in the translation process should align with the intended purpose, or skopos, of the translation. Skopos is a Greek word that means purpose in English. It underscores that human translators should have a deep understanding of the source materials<sup>[5]</sup>. Each text, whether it is an original work or a translation, is created with a specific purpose in mind. The Skopos rule dictates that translators must ensure their translations serve the intended purpose of the text, allowing it to effectively communicate with its target audience<sup>[6]</sup>.

### 2.2.2. The coherence rule

The coherence rule in translation emphasizes the importance of ensuring that the translated text is culturally appropriate and understandable to the target audience. It requires translators to consider the cultural context and linguistic nuances of the target language to ensure coherence and readability for the readers<sup>[7]</sup>. If a translation fails to meet this rule, it may lack meaning and effectiveness, leading translators to refrain from translating it altogether.

### 2.2.3. The fidelity rule

The fidelity rule, the third principle in translation, prioritizes faithfulness to the source text. This entails ensuring that the information conveyed in the target text remains consistent with that of the source text. According to this rule, the form and content of the translation should align with the original text and the purpose of the translation. As the foundation of translation, the original text holds paramount importance, and translators must strive to maintain its integrity<sup>[8]</sup>

Skopos theory emphasizes catering to the target audience's preferences in translation methods, ensuring effective communication in the target language<sup>[9]</sup>. This approach extends to non-literary texts like the *Government Work Report*, enhancing their dissemination and understanding.

## 3. Strategies for translating the 2019 Government Work Report

Different translation strategies have been used to translate the *2019 Government Report* based on the Skopos theory, which will be described in the following sections.

### 3.1. Literal translation

Literal translation aims to faithfully replicate not only the syntax, style, and figures of speech of a literary

work, but also its main sentence structures or patterns <sup>[10]</sup>. Eugene Nida, a renowned contemporary American translator, is recognized for his approach of prioritizing the translation of meaning over mere linguistic form when translating material.

Translators should strive to the author's intent in the translation to evoke a similar response from readers. It is important to maintain the linguistic form of the original text while also adhering to language norms. Additionally, incorporating elements of literal translation can help ensure fidelity to the original text.

“Socialism with Chinese characteristics for a new era” has become widely recognized among foreign readers, and its literal translation is readily accepted. While socialism may not be embraced by all Western countries, China's development has increased global awareness of its unique characteristics. Being a socialist country, China consistently implements socialist policies worldwide, making it easier for many foreigners to accept this concept. Moreover, the phrase adopts English grammar and usage, facilitating global understanding of Chinese perspectives. Thus, faithfully adhering to the original text in content and form helps achieve the communicative purpose while aligning with the principles of purpose, faithfulness, and coherence <sup>[11]</sup>.

However, terms like “打虎” (*dahu*), “拍蝇” (*paiying*), and “猎狐” (*liehu*) may not be familiar to most foreign readers as they carry political and cultural connotations. “虎” (*hu*, tiger), “蝇” (*ying*, fly), and “狐” (*hu*, fox) are metaphors used to describe corrupt officials. Tigers, flies, and foxes represent negative aspects in Chinese culture: tigers symbolize power, flies represent filth, and foxes signify cunning. While these metaphors are clear to Chinese readers, they may not be easily understood by English speakers. Thus, a literal translation may not effectively convey the intended meaning to English readers. Instead, translation should focus on communicating the message while preserving the original language characteristics in a manner comprehensible to English speakers.

## 3.2. Free translation

Free translation seeks to convey the essence or spirit of the source material's meaning. Different human translators may interpret the same material differently, <sup>[12]</sup> especially in literature translation where inference often comes into play.

While human translators aim to convey their understanding of the original materials, <sup>[13]</sup> there is a possibility of leading receptors to a misunderstanding. Free translation encompasses various methods such as amplification, omission, literal translation with remarks, and explanatory translation. These methods serve to enrich the target material with cultural and political context, enhancing its overall depth and authenticity.

### 3.2.1. Amplification

Chinese culture is extensive and profound, with many sayings containing timeless principles <sup>[14]</sup>. However, these culturally significant phrases are often brief and concise, making them challenging to understand without proper context <sup>[15]</sup>. Without explanations added in translation, readers may struggle to grasp their meaning. Amplification can help address this by expanding upon the content of these words, allowing for a clearer understanding and conveying the linguistic nuances of the original text to some extent.

The term “拦路虎” (*lanluhu*; literally meaning “tigers blocking the road”) is commonly used metaphorically to represent obstacles and challenges encountered along one's journey. Directly translating it as “tigers in the road” fails to capture its cultural and historical connotations. Therefore, “Holding up development” is utilized to convey its intended meaning effectively. This approach allows English readers to comprehend its practical significance within the given context, while also appreciating the unique charm of the Chinese expression.

The theme of the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China is highly regarded among Chinese people. The translation of “初心” (*chuxin*) is particularly appreciated, although it carries a vague definition and may be interpreted differently by different individuals. Most commonly, it is understood as the original aspiration or the initial intention. However, in the context of the *Government Work Report*, it is translated as “why you started,” which is more aligned with the discussion of humanity’s future and conveys a broader message to all individuals. Similarly, “始终” (*shizhong*) is translated as “your mission,” emphasizing its role as the foundation of one’s mission. These translations help foreigners better understand the significance of the statement in the report.

### 3.2.2. Omitting

The Chinese language is complex, allowing for repetition, highlighting, and emphasis. In contrast, English tends to avoid repetition, favoring concise expression and appropriate reduction. Therefore, in translation from Chinese to English, it is often preferable to omit repetitive elements for clarity.

Both “青年兴则国家兴” (*qingnianxing ze guojiaxing*) and “青年强则国家强” (*qingnianqiang ze guojiaqiang*) convey the same idea that “the country will be strong if the youth are strong.” However, translating both phrases would result in unnecessary repetition in the target text. Therefore, in the interest of conciseness and clarity, the English translation in the *Government Work Report* states “only when its young people thrive, a nation will prosper.”

Some prepositions in English might be omitted when it is translated into Chinese. For example, when stating that the People’s Republic of China was founded in 1949, the preposition “in” is often omitted in the translation. In the *Government Work Report*, human translators may simply state “1949年中华人民共和国成立了” (1949 *nian zhongguo renmin gongheguo chenglile*) without the corresponding “in.” While this may seem incomplete to English readers unfamiliar with Chinese linguistic conventions, it reflects the common usage of omitting certain words in Chinese daily expressions. A comprehensive translation aims to facilitate understanding for English readers who may not be acquainted with Chinese language nuances.

### 3.2.3. Literal translation with remarks

Remarks in literal translation serve as valuable tools for foreigners to learn about the stories and policies behind the source materials. By providing explanations alongside literal translations, readers gain insight into Chinese policies and gain a deeper understanding of the text. This approach not only plays a significant role in propagating information but also facilitates a more profound comprehension of the source materials.

For example, in understanding phrases like “五位一体” (*wuweiyiti*) and “四个全面” (*sigequanmian*), knowledge of the relevant Chinese policies is essential. “五位一体” (*wuweiyiti*) refers to the comprehensive plan for advancing development across economic, political, cultural, social, and ecological domains to achieve socialism with Chinese characteristics. “四个全面” (*sigequanmian*) denotes the pursuit of deepening reform, enhancing governance, enforcing discipline, and promoting the rule of law to construct a prosperous society across all aspects. These phrases, coined within the context of the new era, signify fresh ideologies and policies. Furthermore, their frequent appearance in Chinese political discourse underscores their significance.

The literal translation of “五位一体” (*wuweiyiti*) as “Five-Sphere Integrated Plan” and “四个全面” (*sigequanmian*) as “Four-Pronged Comprehensive Strategy” maintains the structure of the original language but may not be readily understood by foreigners unfamiliar with Chinese policies.<sup>[17]</sup> By incorporating remarks alongside these translations, as guided by Skopos theory, foreigners can better comprehend the intended meaning within their own countries’ policy contexts.

### 3.2.4. Explanatory translation

Chinese words often have more flexibility than English, which can pose challenges for foreigners in understanding their meaning<sup>[18]</sup>. While English relies on grammar to convey meaning, Chinese words may have multiple meanings, requiring explanatory translation to clarify their intended sense.

For instance, the phrase “京 (*jing*), 津 (*jin*) 冀 (*ji*), 藏 (*zang*), 疆 (*jiang*), 青 (*qing*)” represents various provinces, municipalities, and autonomous regions in China, but its concise nature (no verbs or subjects) may be challenging for foreign readers. In such cases, human translators can provide explanatory translations to ensure comprehension. By adding the full names of the provinces, such as “Beijing, Tianjin, Hebei, Xizang, Xinjiang, Qinghai” foreign readers can easily grasp the text. Guided by Skopos theory, translators can employ various translation methods tailored to the cultural and linguistic preferences of the target audience, thereby facilitating effective intercultural communication.

Under the guidance of Skopos theory, various methods can be used to translate the *Government Work Report* according to the target language readers’ culture and customs. This approach ensures that the translation is well-received by the recipient, facilitating effective intercultural communication<sup>[19]</sup>.

## 4. Conclusion

Through an analysis of the development and underlying principles of Skopos theory, as well as the translation strategies employed in translating the *Government Work Report*, it is evident that translators can utilize various strategies, such as literal and free translation, to achieve the goals of Skopos, coherence, and fidelity. By employing appropriate methods and strategies, the translated text effectively serves its communicative function, allowing foreigners to gain insights into Chinese policies and the economy. Moreover, it can be observed that there is a similarity between Skopos theory and the translation of the *Government Work Report*. Both aim to convey the accurate message of the source material to the intended audience, whether domestic or international, reflecting the position and attitude of the Chinese government. Thus, both Skopos theory and the translation of the *Government Work Report* prioritize effective communication and understanding between the source and target audiences.

## Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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