

On discourse construction of national image from the perspective of coordination theory: a case study of the *Report on the Work of the Government in 2023*

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Abstract: The *Report on the Work of the Government* is an important political document of our Party and government, with its concepts, categories, and related expressions reflecting distinct traditional Chinese cultural characteristics. Therefore, translation needs to take into account a number of multiple elements to present China's story in a way that foreigners easily understand and articulate China's unique policy guidelines. Translation coordination theory asserts that language and style in translation should be harmonious, and all elements requiring reconciliation should be coordinated. This study adopts the theoretical perspective of translation coordination, focusing on vocabulary, syntax, and discourse to explore the translation techniques in the Chinese-English translation of the *Report on the Work of the Government in 2023*. The aim is to provide a deeper understanding of the multi-faceted essence of government documents from a coordination perspective, examine their impact on constructing China's image, and foster a better understanding of China.

Key words: translation coordination theory; *Report on the Work of the Government*; Chinese-English translation; national image

1 Introduction

Since the beginning of the new century, the *Report on the Work of the Government* has become an authoritative source of information for the international community to understand China's political, economic, and technological situation. Therefore, the quality of English translations of the *Report on the Work of the Government* must meet high standards. Just as Chen Mingming, a renowned expert in Chinese-English translation, stated when evaluating the translation of the *19th Party Congress Report*: "In the past, foreign media described our political document translations as tedious and dry... We must update our translation principles and abandon inaccurate, outdated, misinterpreted, and even detrimental translation techniques [1]." In light of this situation, this paper aims to explain, argue, and analyze how translation coordination theory is reflected and maximized in the *Report on the Work of the Government in 2023*, guided by the translation coordination theory proposed by Gao Jian. This research is of great value in deepening readers' understanding of the cultural connotations of government work reports, facilitating the coordination of language and cultural differences between English and Chinese and ensuring accurate comprehension and dissemination of their essence. It contributes to the international communication and understanding of China's image and promotes effective coordination

and communication among different cultural civilizations.

2 Literature review

Analyzing and interpreting the *Report on the Work of the Government* is a critical task for many researchers in the field of translation. Numerous scholars have explored the application and effects of various translation theories in the translation of annual government work reports from different theoretical perspectives. For instance, Wen Yanchun studied vocabulary-level translation techniques and argued that functional equivalence translation theory plays a crucial role in the translation of the report, emphasizing the importance of functional and faithful translation principles [2]. Zhang Mingyan observed that, in terms of vocabulary and syntax, the English version of the government work report presents a more static nature, while the Chinese version exhibits greater dynamism [3]. Song Bingbing applied corpus linguistics to conduct interlingual and intralingual comparisons of the government work report, finding that the English translation of the report has a higher frequency of word usage, relatively low vocabulary variation, and a noticeable simplification tendency [4]. It is evident that most researchers have focused on vocabulary and syntax, with fewer studies exploring the syntactic and textual levels from the perspective of translation coordination theory.

3 Translation coordination theory

The translation coordination theory proposed by Gao Jian aligns with the ancient Chinese philosophical concept of "zhonghe" or harmony [5]. According to Wu Junmin and Gao Jian's description, translation coordination theory encompasses the entire translation process, requiring coordination at all levels and in all aspects, and resolving countless contradictions and conflicts present in the source text [6]. The concept of "harmony" in translation theory mainly focuses on static descriptions based on aesthetic concepts, while "coordination" entails both static and dynamic meanings. The notion of translation coordination aligns with the understanding of translation as a process of balancing, selection, and adaptation.

Translation coordination theory posits that translation itself is a process of coordination, cross-cultural harmonization, and communication, practice, and a result of mutual coordination, concession, and integration among different linguistic elements. The greater the cultural differences between the source text and the translation, the greater the extent of coordination required. Conversely, when the cultural difference between the source text and the translation is close to zero, minimal coordination is necessary to facilitate smooth cultural exchange between the source text and the translation.

4 Coordination theory and national image

"As a special way of cultural expression, translation plays an indispensable role in the construction and development of the national image [7]." There are differences between translators and authors in the manner of cogitation, cultural backgrounds, and other aspects as well as differences between Chinese and foreign languages and cultures. Translation coordination theory plays an effective role in coordinating the differences between Chinese and foreign cultures, especially in the differences between language nationality and language naturalness, localization and exoticization, and author's style and translator's style. Through all aspects of coordination, it will promote mutual communication between China and other countries and regions of the world, effectively build up China's image as a responsible great power.

5 Analysis of the *Report on the Work of the Government in 2023* from the perspective of translation coordination

The Chinese version of *Report on the Work of the Government* is an authentic official language that conforms to the Chinese way of thinking and logical structure. It has been carefully examined and refined by numerous experts and scholars through multiple practices. It exhibits distinct characteristics of Chinese traditional culture in terms of vocabulary, syntax, and discourse, making it difficult to find exact equivalents in English [8]. Additionally, due to cultural differences

between countries, people from different nations have different ways of thinking. Therefore, in the English version of the *Report on the Work of the Government*, modifications are often made in terms of word usage and textual structure to better align with the thinking habits of foreign readers. This ensures a more coordinated translation and effectively establishes the image of China, enabling the world to quickly understand and gain deeper insights into Chinese people.

5.1 Lexical level

When conducting Chinese-English translation, we must approach it from a macro perspective and start from a micro perspective. That is, starting from word selection, moving from vocabulary to sentences, then from sentences to paragraphs, and finally elevating paragraphs to the level of discourse. It involves choosing the right words, structuring sentences, and organizing the overall composition.

5.1.1 The translation of vocabulary with Chinese characteristics

Vocabulary with Chinese characteristics, as the name suggests, refers to a form of expression that embodies distinctive traditional Chinese cultural features, such as certain political terms. The content of the government work report covers the current state of national development and future development plans, using many unique Chinese expressions. When translating, it is necessary to grasp their accurate meanings and ensure the use of English words that best match the original intent. It is important to maintain a sense of balance in translation, coordinate the differences in vocabulary expression between Chinese and English, so that people can have a macro understanding of China's development from these words, thereby strengthening communication and cooperation between our country and other nations.

SS1: 精神文化生活

TT1: intellectual and cultural lives

In the past, this phrase was translated as "spiritual and cultural life", which is inappropriate. The Chinese understanding of "精神" (spirit) is relative to the material world, emphasizing intellectual qualities and moral standards. It differs from the English term "spirit", which also carries the meaning of "a ghost" and has strong religious connotations. Here, the use of "intellectual" emphasizes rationality and wisdom, highlighting activities that have a positive significance for our spiritual and cultural development, thereby reflecting China's image as a great civilization.

5.1.2 The translation of four-character idioms

Chinese four-character idioms are concise, vivid, and rhythmical, but there is no direct equivalent in English. Therefore, coordination is required during translation to ensure the target language is understood by foreign readers.

SS2: 在极不平凡的抗疫历程中，各地区各部门各单位做了大量工作，各行各业共克时艰，广大医务人员不畏艰辛。

TT2: Throughout this truly remarkable endeavor, all localities, departments, and organizations have made tremendous efforts, people in various sectors have worked together to get through tough times, and all medical personnel have remained fearless in the face of adversity.

In this case, the original text describes the story of the Chinese people helping each other, standing together, and overcoming difficulties during the extraordinary fight against the epidemic. The translation also coordinates the two four-character idioms "共克时艰" and "不畏艰辛", allowing foreign readers to deeply appreciate the fine qualities of Chinese people who fear no hardships, rise to challenges, and prioritize unity and friendship. It reflects the image of China as a united, responsible, and people-oriented nation.

5.2 Syntax level

Sentences are composed of words and phrases, and they are more complex than individual words. They serve as the fundamental linguistic units that systematically and orderly convey complete meanings to readers. As a result, the cultural

and linguistic differences between English and Chinese are more pronounced in many sentences, making it possible to maximize coordination in Chinese-English translation.

5.2.1 The treatment of active and passive voice

English tends to use the passive voice more frequently, placing the narrative focus on the action's result or the recipient of the action. On the other hand, Chinese language uses the passive voice relatively less, with the narrative perspective often focusing on the agent of the action. Therefore, translators should pay attention to the mutual conversion between active and passive voice when translating. When translating from Chinese to English, it is important to follow English language conventions and meet the requirements of foreign readers by using the passive voice to replace the active voice, achieving coordination between the voices.

SS3: 加强知识产权保护，激发创新动力。

TT3: Intellectual property rights protection was bolstered to encourage innovation.

In the Western language system, it is common to use abstract nouns without an animate subject, making the expression more objective and devoid of subjective color. In this sentence, the active voice is translated into the passive voice, with "intellectual property rights protection" as the subject. This reflects the translation coordination theory in the English version of the *Report on the Work of the Government in 2023* and showcases China's image as a country that values innovation and the development of a knowledge-based economy.

5.2.2 The treatment of sentences without a subject

English places importance on subject-verb agreement, requiring a complete subject-predicate structure as a necessary condition for a complete English sentence. Logical accuracy is the foundation. However, Chinese tends to express the complete meaning of a sentence through logical connections between words and phrases. It can be governed by syntactic relationships, meanings, and other factors. Additionally, given that *Report on the Work of the Government* is a formal and professional political discourse, it is not appropriate to add too much subjective color. Therefore, the subject is often omitted in Chinese sentences, adopting a subject-less structure [8]. Consequently, when translating from Chinese to English, coordination is necessary to bridge the cultural differences in expression to make the article easy to read for foreign readers.

SS4: 不断优化支出结构，教育科技、生态环保、基本民生等重点领域得到有力保障。

TT4: We continued to improve the structure of government spending and ensured sufficient funding for key areas such as education, science and technology, environmental protection, and efforts to meet people's basic living needs.

The original sentence omits the subject "我们". In the context of the entire discourse, the omission of the subject does not lead to ambiguity. Instead, it enhances the commanding tone, seriousness, and objectivity. During translation, coordination was achieved by adding the word "we" to facilitate understanding for foreign readers. This reflects China's image as a great nation that cares about people's well-being, sustainable development, and social progress.

5.3 Discourse level

Discourse, as a form of "communicative activity", plays a crucial role in an article. As stated in *Introduction to Systemic Functional Linguistics*, "When the meaning of one element in the discourse relies on the interpretation of another element, a cohesive relationship is formed [9]." It can be seen that coherence at the discourse level is essential for the article to have cohesion.

5.3.1 The use of subordinate clauses

Chinese relies heavily on semantic coherence and contextual integration, with less connection between sentence components and a less compact structure. The *Report on the Work of the Government* uses many long sentences with a

single-sentence structure and minimal use of conjunctions or transitional words. In contrast, English, as a "paratactic" language, has a variety of sentence structures, and the relationship between sentence components is more explicit. Therefore, in translation, it is necessary to consider both the whole and the specific, identify the precise logical relationships hidden in the original text, and appropriately use subordinate clauses, conjunctions, and transitional words to ensure that the translation aligns with the language habits of the target language readers.

SS5: 深入实施“强基计划”和基础学科拔尖人才培养计划。

TT5: We launched a plan that enables institutions of higher learning to recruit students who excel in basic academic disciplines, as well as a plan to cultivate top talent in basic disciplines.

The modifying phrase "基础学科拔尖人才培养计划" in the original sentence is relatively long. In the translation, it is rendered as a relative clause, effectively adjusting the sentence structure of the translation, and coordinating the logical connection between sentences. This not only clarifies the meaning of the original text but also aligns with the reading habits of the target language readers, reflecting China's image as a country that emphasizes scientific and technological development, talent cultivation, and innovation capability enhancement.

5.3.2 The use of ellipsis

Chinese often uses similar words or phrases to emphasize a core concept, while English emphasizes conciseness and often uses pronouns, phrases, or ellipses for clarification. Therefore, in translation, it is necessary to increase the use of pronouns or generalizing words to avoid repetition [10].

SS6: 建设 288 个基础学科拔尖学生培养基地，接续推进世界一流大学和一流学科建设，不断夯实发展的人才基础。

TT6: We opened 288 training centers for high-performing students in basic disciplines and continued to develop world-class universities and world-class disciplines. By doing so, we have laid a solid foundation for talent development.

In this sentence, the first two subordinate clauses are measures that lead to the last subordinate clause. However, to avoid repetition, the translation uses "by doing so" instead of translating each subordinate clause separately. This not only coordinates the language differences between Chinese and English but also translates the original Chinese into concise English that is more acceptable to foreign readers. It reflects China's image as a country that values education and talent development.

6 Conclusion

The Report on the Work of the Government is a summary of past work and plans made by the Party and the state for the Chinese people. As an important political document of the Party and the state and a guide for the actions of the people, it requires meticulous translation that is accurate in wording, clear in logic, and detailed in prioritization. This article, guided by the theory of translation coordination proposed by Gao Jian, analyzes how the *Report on the Work of the Government in 2023* maximizes translation coordination at the lexical, syntactic, and discourse levels, effectively constructing China's image as a civilized and responsible major country that values education, innovation, and the well-being of its people. It also provides useful insights for translators in translating political documents in the future. In future translation work, translators should consider the differences between English and Chinese, coordinate these differences, and tell and convey the content of *Report on the Work of the Government* to foreign readers in a way that they appreciate, present Chinese stories in English and contribute their modest efforts to building a bridge of communication between people of different cultural backgrounds.

Conflicts of interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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