

# On the Translation of the Government Work Report —Comparing with the State of the Union Address

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**Abstract:** China's splendid achievements and fast development attract the attention of the whole world. The rising of the great power shock the rest countries. More and more people want to know what is happening in this country and what effect it will bring to the world. At the same time, Chinese people have gradually realized the importance of exchanging information with other countries. Under this motivation, the translation of Chinese materials into English becomes necessary and essential. It is an effective way to present China comprehensively. Among all these materials, Government Work Report is one of the most remarkable ones. The translation of it plays a key role to present the image of China to the world. But, compared with State of the Union address, the translation of Government Work Report contains some problems from the perspective of foreignization and domestication theory. This essay will discuss the differences between these two texts at the lexical, syntactic, and discourse level from the angle of foreignization and domestication theory, and give some suggestions to the translation of Government Work Report.

**Keywords:** Government Work Report; Foreignization and domestication theory; State of the Union address; Translation

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## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Background

The Government Work Report (GWR) is an important form of Chinese political document. All levels of government office make a draft of the GWR and is checked and approved by the director of Chinese government. And it will be announced at the National People's Congress and Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference. The GWR mainly contains three parts: looking back to the work of the government in the past one year and draw a conclusion of it; making a working plan of the government of that year; stating how to improve the self-construction of the government of that year. The GWR plays a really essential role not only in instructing the political way of China but also in propagandizing the international image of China and let more and more people known about China's politics, economy and culture. So, the translation of the GWR is really important.

The The States of the Union Address(SUA) is the policy agenda of the ruling class of the United States. It mainly expounds what situation the President faces both

domestically and internationally in the year and what policies and measures the government will take to solve the problems. According to the convention, it is reported by the incumbent President in the annual congress on the government's political direction.

The GWR plays the same role as the SUA in China. Since the target readers of the translation of the GWR is English speakers, we can use the SUA as reference when translating. This essay chooses the translation of the GWR from 2010 to 2012 and the SUA from 2010 to 2012 as the research objects and analyzes the GWR in the perspective of foreignization and domestication theory.

### 1.2 The Significance

Since 1978, China has opened up to the world for more than 30 years. During this period of time, great changes have taken place in China. She has become the focus of the world. More and more people become curious about this ancient eastern country. However large amount of information abroad burst into China. Chinese people know pretty well about the life, politics, economy and culture of foreign countries, while people abroad know little about

China's new changes. Some of them still hold the opinion that China is still a feudal and backward country like the early part of last century. So, the external propaganda is unprecedented urgent. International promotion is of great significance for the development of international relations. Translation is one of the most important methods for improving China's external propaganda. As it is explained in the previous part, the GWR plays a key role in the international promotion work. A good translation of it can work positively, whereas, it can make opposite effects. Many scholars in China studied the GWR and also give some suggestions. However, seldom of them use a comparative text. With the comparison of the two texts of nearly the same function, we can have a new angle to improve the translation of the GWR.

### 1.3 Thesis Statement

In this essay, I will first give a brief introduction of the foreignization and domestication theory, including its development and definition. Then, I will analyze the application of foreignization and domestication theory in the translation of the GWR compared with the SUA mainly at three levels: lexical, syntactic, and textual level. At the end of the body part, I will compare the readability of the GWR and the SUA according to the statistics of the Flesch Read Ease. Subsequently, I will draw a conclusion from the previous analysis and give some constructive comments on the translation of the GWR.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Definition of Foreignization and Domestication

The idea of foreignization and domestication was firstly mentioned by the German philosopher Friedrich Schleiermacher in his paper *On the Different Methods of Translating*. He proposed that there were two methods for translators to take. One is to let the version close to the author and the readers get use to the author. The other is to let the version close to the readers. However, he only explained the initial meaning of these two methods but didn't propose the specific definition. Until 1995, American scholar, Lawrence Venuti named these two methods as "Foreignization and Domestication" in his book *The Translators Invisibility*. In short, the method Foreignization requests translators to translate the text with means of expression of the source language. On the contrary, Domestication method requests to get close to the readers and translate the text with the means of expression of the target language. In other word, Foreignization and Domestication are the extension of literal translation and free translation.

As American scholar Nida said, all people have to eat, work and sleep; they make furniture, tools and cars; they form families, groups and organizations. People in the world are almost doing the same kind of things, which is the reason that people of different culture and different languages can understand each other, and which is also a condition of translation. The similarity of behavior makes foreignization possible. When translating, we usually can find similar means of expression in the target language. Foreignization method makes version express the origin text exactly and properly. It is a good way to spread culture and the ideas of the author. However, there are still many differences between people of different culture and languages. Thus, if we use foreignization strategies all the time, sometimes the version may make the readers confused or even mislead them. So, domestication is needed to reconcile with the readers' habit of reading. Domestication method makes the readers easier to accept the theme of the text, but sometimes it may make the original meaning of the text twisted and inaccurate. Using these two methods properly can improve the quality of translation.

### 2.2 Related Study Abroad

Nida, an influential American linguist and translator, is a scholar who advocated the domestication theory. He proposed, "Translation is the most appropriate with natural and equivalence language from the semantic representation to stylistic source language information." It is his famous theory called "functional equivalence". He thought that the ideal situation should be that the target readers should have the same feelings just like the readers of the source text when reading the version. In a word, he argues that translators should first take the readers' habits, culture background, and expectation into consideration when translating.

Lawrence Venuti, a famous American translator, advocates foreignization theory mainly in his two books: *A History of Translation* (1995) and *The Scandals of Translation: Towards an Ethics of Difference* (1998). He opposes the domestication theory because he thought domestication is a kind of cultural invasion. He argues that translators should keep the original style of the source text and instruct the target readers to understand and adapt the author. He also appeals translators to restrain the ethnocentric violence of translation through the foreignization method.

### 2.3 Related Study in China

In China, the studies of the translation of the GWR main focus on the analysis of the application of translation theory or strategies, for example, *The Characteristics of the*

political style and translation strategies—take the translation of the government work report in 2011 for example (Xiaojun Li, 2011). Some scholars study the translation of the GWR especially at the lexical level with corpus based, for example, On the study of the lexical characters of the translation of Chinese "government Work Report" (Chen Jiansheng, Cui Yani, 2010).

Foreignization and domestication has become the focus of argumentation among Chinese scholars for many years. Some scholars advocate the foreignization theory and firmly oppose the method of domestication, for example, Liu Yingkai proposes in his paper Domestication—Forked Way of Translation that domestication will obliterate a nation's cultural characters and it will definitely twist the original theme of the source text. Some scholars adopt Nida's opinion and advocates the method of domestication, for example, Liu Biqing proposes in his book Cultural Translation Theory that whether the version is successful or not depends on the readers' feelings.

### 3. The Comparison Between the Translation of Government Work Report and State of the Union address from the Angle of Foreignization and Domestication Theory

#### 3.1 Foreignization and Domestication Theory at the Lexical Level

##### 3.1.1 Some Statistics of the Two Texts Based on Corpus

Corpus-based research has developed for nearly four decades in China. The research use the real language as the study subject with an aid of modern computer scientific technology and take the method of data driven positivism. So the result of research is more direct, obvious and accurate.

This part mainly discuss some comparative differences between the GWR and the SUA at the lexical level based on corpus. In order to study it more accurate, the corpus I use is a comparable corpus which contains the translation of the GWR and the State of the Union Address. Both of the two texts I choose are from 2009 to 2012. The English versions of the GWR are all from the Xin Hua net which are authorized by Chinese government. The software I choose to get the statistics is Microsoft Word, 2007 edition.

The average length of words is a ratio of the total number of letters and the number of the words in a text. It is an important index to present the style of a text. If the average length of the words is long means the text is relatively formal. According to the corpus, the average lengths of words are as followed:

**Table 1**

	The English version of the GWR	The SUA
AWL	5.6	4.6

It is obvious that the average word length of the GWR is much longer than that of the State of the Union Address. Farther more, we can also take another index into consideration. It is the ratios of long words (word length  $\geq 10$ ) of the two texts. The result is as followed:

**Table 2**

	The English version of the GWR	The SUA
TWs	44490	26059
Long words	5318	2110
Ratio	12.4%	4.6%

According to Table 2, the ratio of long words of the English version of the GWR is bigger than that of the SUA. It means that the English version of the GWR contains much more long words than the State of the Union Address. Thus, based on the statistics of Table 1 and the Table 2, we can see that the English version of the GWR is more formal than the SUA. So, at the same time it is harder to understand.

##### 3.1.2 Features of the Two Texts at the Lexical Level

In this part, the English version of RWG will be discussed at the lexical level compared with the State of the Union Address. Chinese and English belong to different families of language. They are of many differences not only in the external structure but in the culture they contains. Nida said, "the greater the differences between source language and target language, the greater the need for adjustments"(Nida 2001, 95). The choices of word of the English version of GWR differ from the SUA.

###### 1) Words with Chinese characters

Because of the seriousness and importance of the GWR, foreignization strategy is often used at the lexical level to make sure the version is faithful to the source text and the culture of China. There are many words with Chinese characters appear in the GWR. We cannot find a suitable or similar word not only in the SUA but in other English materials.

Exp1. 改革开放是决定中国前途命运的正确抉择。必须按照科学发展观要求，尊重群众首创精神，大胆探索，以更大决心和勇气继续全面推进经济体制、政

治体制等各项改革，破解发展难题。

Reform and opening up are the right choice we made for China's destiny and future. We must respect the people's creativity; boldly explore and political systems, with greater resolve and courage; and solve complex issues in development in line with the requirements of the Scientific Outlook on Development.

The two phrases "改革开放" and "科学发展观" are with Chinese characters and there are no matched words in English, so when translating them, foreignization strategy is used. This kind of translation has a pre-condition that the version should be understandable to the target receptors. Sometimes the direct translation of these words and phrases will make the readers puzzled. At this situation, domestication strategy should be taken.

Exp2. 中央财政"三农"支出超过1万亿元，比上年增加1839亿元。

Central government spending on agriculture, rural areas and farmers exceeded one trillion yuan, a year-on-year increase of 183.9 billion yuan.

If "三农" was translated into English directly, the readers cannot understand its real meaning. So domestication strategy is used here.

## 2) Category words

There are many category words in the GWR such as "问题"、"情况"、"状态"。For example, the word "问题" appears 24 times only in the GWR of 2012. They are of high frequency. However, the word "problem" appear only once in the SUA of 2012.

Exp3.

解决发展不平衡、不协调、不可持续的问题，关键在于...

The key to solve the problems of imbalanced, uncoordinated, and unsustainable development is to... (GWR)

What's at stake aren't Democratic values or Republican values, but American's values.

利害攸关的问题不是民主党的价值观或共和党的价值观，而是美国的价值观。(SUA)

I believe as strongly as ever that we should take on illegal immigration

我极其坚定地相信，我们应着手解决非法移民问题。(SUA)

The word "问题" in the examples is category word. In the English version of the sentence of the GWR in not

necessary and should be omitted compared with the two sentences of the SUA. From my perspective, the translation should be "the key to take on the imbalanced, uncoordinated, and unsustainable development is to...".

## 3) Tautology

Tautology here does not mean repetition which is for rhetorical or grammatical reasons. Tautology here means the unnecessary one. Since repetition is really common in Chinese, however, in English repetition is often avoided. So, when translating, it is inevitable to pay more attention to this point.

Exp.4

全国各族人民在中国共产党领导下，同心同德，团结奋进，改革开放和社会主义现代化建设取得新的重大成就。

Working hard with one heart and one mind under the leadership of the Communist Party of China (CPC), the Chinese people of all ethnic groups made significant achievement in reform, opening up, and socialist modernization. (GWR)

They focus on the mission at hand. They work together.

他们全神贯注于肩负的使命。他们为此同心协力。(SUA)

"One heart" and "one mind" are of the same meaning, so there is no need to repeat. Compared with the sentence of the SUA, the expression of the English version of the former sentence of the GWR is much more complex and redundant. So, according to the domestication strategy, the suggestion for modification is to omit "one heart" or "one mind" or make the translation more simple, for example, "Working hard together...".

## 3.2 Foreignization and Domestication Theory at the Syntactic Level

### 3.2.1 Treatment of Zero-Subject Sentences

The grammatical rules of Chinese is much more flexible than English. Zero-subject sentences are quite common in the GWR, however in the SUA, it is seldom to be seen. According to the domestication theory, proper subjects should be added to the zero-sentences when translating. Otherwise, the target readers may be confused about the English version.

Exp5.

全面落实强农惠农富农政策，加大农业生产补贴力度...

We fully implemented the policy of strengthening agri-

cultural, benefitting farmers, and enriching rural areas.

In this example, there is no subject in the Chinese version. When translating, the subject "we" is added into this sentence. The word "We" here refers to the government. Since "we" has a general meaning, it is often used to be added as subject in the translation of the GWR.

### 3.2.2 The Treatment of Long Sentences

The average length of sentences can be an index to represent the complexity of an article. The more long sentences an article contains, the more complex it is, and the more difficult to be understood. According to the comparative corpus mentioned in the previous part, the length of the sentences in the GWR and those in the SUA are different. The results are as followed:

Table 3

	The English version of the GWR	The SUA
ALS	24.5	15.8

According to the table, the average length of sentence of the GWR is much longer than that of the SUA. From the statistics in the table, we can see that the GWR is more formal than the SUA, and at the same time it is more complicated and harder to understand than the SUA. So based on the domestication strategy, the suggestion for translation is to simplify the sentences.

Exp1. 我们将坚定不移地贯彻 "一国两制"、"港人治港"、"澳人治澳"、高度自治的方针,全力支持香港、澳门发展经济,改善民生,推进民主。

We will unwaveringly implement the principle of "one country, two systems" under which the people of Hong Kong govern Hong Kong and the people of Macao govern Macao and both regions enjoy a high degree of autonomy, and we will fully support the two regions in growing their economics, improving the people's wellbeing and promoting democracy.

There are 56 words in this sentence. Such super long sentence is very common in the GWR. These long sentences can make reading become difficult and make the target readers feel tired. From my perspective, the translation can be rewritten as:

"We will unwaveringly implement the principle of 'one country, two systems'. Under this policy, the people of Hong Kong govern Hong Kong and the people of Macao govern Macao and both regions enjoy a high degree of autonomy. And we will fully support the two regions in growing their economics, improving the people's wellbe-

ing and promoting democracy."

The original translation is divided into three relatively short sentences. And it becomes easier to read and understand.

### 3.3 Foreignization and Domestication Theory at Textual Level

A good version should achieve not only at the lexical and syntactic level but also at the textual level. In this part, the foreignization and domestication theory at textual level will be discussed. Text is, by no means, a pile of sentences simply standing together. "The 'text' in linguistics refers to any passage, spoken or written, of whatever length, that does form a unified whole, i.e. it is defined by consistence as to register and cohesion and by inner connection" (Halliday and Hasan, 1976). So, text is a collection of sentences of the same semantic meaning or with inner connections and close relationship between them. It can be long or short. Among all elements of text, cohesion is one of the most important one. Because of this element, text can be connected to be a unity. So, the study of the English version of the GWR at the textual level here mainly refers to study the cohesion of it. And there are mainly two aspects of cohesion: one is reference, and the other one is conjunction.

#### 3.3.1 Reference

Halliday defined reference as "a Participant or circumstantial element introduced at one place in the text can be taken as a reference point for something that follows. In the simplest case, this means that the same thing comes in again." The simplest and most common case of reference is that when something appears in the article for the first time, the full name of it is often mentioned, but when it is mentioned again, the thing will be replaced by a pronoun or the category word which it belongs to.

Exp6.

新的一年,我们要继续坚持中央对台工作的大政方针,增强两岸关系发展的政治、经济、文化和民意基础,拓展两岸关系和平发展新局面。

In 2012, we will adhere to the central leadership's policies on work related to Taiwan; strengthen the political, economic, and cultural foundation and public support for growing cross-Straits relations; and make further progress in promoting their peaceful development.

In this example, when the phrase "两岸关系" is first mentioned, it is translated into "cross-Straits relations". When it is mentioned for the second time, the phrase is replaced by the pronoun "their". This method can avoid unnecessary repetition and make the whole text become

more coherent. This kind of examples is very common in the English version of the GWR. In Chinese writings, repetition of words and phrases are often used, but in English the situation is opposite. So, according to the domestication strategy, reference is often used when translating.

### 3.3.2 Conjunction

Conjunction is the other way to make text more coherent. It involves formal conjunctive words to link the phrases, sentences, and texts. Conjunctive words can present the relations between phrases, sentences, and texts. In Chinese, they are not often used and not as necessary as that in English. So, when translating the GWR, this aspect should be paid more attention, because it is common for translators to add conjunctive words in the English version of the GWR.

Exp7.

全面加强军队革命化现代化正规化建设，不断提高以打赢信息化条件下局部战争能力为核心的完成多样化军事任务的能力。

We will make the armed forces more revolutionary, modern, and standardized in all respects so they can comprehensively accomplish their historic mission at the new stage in the new century.

In this example, a conjunctive word "so" is added into the English version of this sentence. The latter part of the sentence tells the expected result of the former part, but in Chinese narration, the relationship is not represented clearly. So when translating the conjunctive word is added properly.

### 3.4 Readability of the GWR Comparing with the SUA

I made a test about the two texts from Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia. "The Flesch/Flesch–Kincaid readability tests are designed to indicate comprehension difficulty when reading a passage of contemporary academic English. There are two tests, the Flesch Reading Ease, and the Flesch–Kincaid Grade Level." The core measures are words length and sentence length. This test is designed by Rudolf Flesch who is a writer, readability expert and writing consultant.

In the Flesch Reading Ease test, higher scores indicate material that is easier to read; lower numbers mark passages that are more difficult to read. The formula for the Flesch Reading Ease Score (FRES) test is

$$206.835 - 1.015 \left( \frac{\text{total words}}{\text{total sentences}} \right) - 84.6 \left( \frac{\text{total syllables}}{\text{total words}} \right)$$

Scores can be interpreted as shown in the table below:

**Table 4**

Scores	Notes
90.0–100.0	easily understood by an average 11-year-old student
60.0–70.0	easily understood by 13- to 15-year-old students
0.0–30.0	best understood by university graduates

The formula of the Flesch–Kincaid Grade Level is:

$$0.39 \left( \frac{\text{total words}}{\text{total sentences}} \right) + 11.8 \left( \frac{\text{total syllables}}{\text{total words}} \right) - 15.59$$

I use the English version of the GWR and the SUA from 2010 to 2012 as the test objects and use the Microsoft Word 2007 edition as the tool. The result of the test is as followed:

**Table 5**

	The English version of the GWR	The SUA
The Flesch Reading Ease(FRE)	25.2	63.5
The Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level(F-K GL)	14.6	8.1

According to Table 4 and Table 5, we can see that the index of FRE of the GWR is much lower than that of the SUA, and it belongs to the most difficult category of reading materials among the three categories listed in Table 4. It means that for the target readers, only those with university education background can best understand the English version of the GWR. So the translation of the GWR cannot fulfill the mission of propagandizing China to the world. Improvements should be made to change this situation.

As it mentioned in the previous part of this essay, using simple words and sentences can make the text easier to understand. Besides, domestication strategy should be taken more in the translation of the GWR, and it can also make the English version more acceptable to the target readers.

## 4. Conclusion

At the previous part of this essay, I give a brief introduction of the GWR and the SUA, and also introduce the era background and significance of the translation of the GWR. Then I briefly summarized the previous study related to the topic of this essay. In the body part, I argue the English version of the GWR at the lexical, syntactic and

textual level compared with the SUA, and at the end of the body part, I test the readability of the English version of the GWR and the SUA in the method of the Flesch/Flesch–Kincaid readability tests. In the study, I mainly take the methods of corpus based analysis, comparison analysis, example illustration. As it is illustrated in the body part, compared with the SUA, there are still some problems in the English version of the GWR. Due to the importance and special position of the GWR, translators always try to be faithful to the original text. So, they are over cautious to use domestication strategy. As a result, the English version of the GWR is complicated and difficult to read. So in this essay, according to the foreignization and domestication strategy, I propose some suggestions to the translation, such as to use simple words, to avoid unnecessary repetition and to divide long and complicated sentences.

Since the limitation of my own ability and the amount of the study material is limited, there inevitably exist defects in this essay. I hope that the shortcomings can be pointed out.

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