

## The Application of Cohesion in the Translation of Political Documents: Take 2017 Government Work Report as an Example

Li Zhang<sup>1</sup>, Cuimei Zhang<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Professor in School of Foreign Languages, North China Electric Power University, NO, 689 Road, North District, Baoding, Hebei, China

<sup>2</sup>Graduate Student in School of Foreign Languages, North China Electric Power University, NO, 689 Road, North District, Baoding, Hebei, China

**\*Corresponding author**

*Li Zhang*

### Article History

*Received: 04.01.2018*

*Accepted: 20.01.2018*

*Published: 30.01.2018*

### DOI:

10.21276/sjhss.2018.3.1.16



**Abstract:** The government work report is a kind of style with Chinese characters of language expression. Therefore, when translating it, the translator must first understand the source language's expression and analyze the discourse in order to make effective language conversion. Cohesion is one of the important methods of discourse analysis. In this paper, the author, taking 2017 government work report as an example, analyzes the application of discourse cohesion in government work report, emphasizing the importance of cultivating the ability of intralingual understanding and the awareness of cohesion in the process of Chinese to English Translation.

**Keywords:** cohesive devices; discourse analysis; government work report; translation.

### INTRODUCTION

This paper focuses on the applications of the cohesive devices in the 2017 government work report of China. The government work report has unique discourse characteristics, such as the frequent appearance of repeated words, long sentences, simple sentence structure, imperative predicate structure and juxtaposition phrases, the lack of subject, less use of connected components and no clear logical relationship between sentences. According to JiaYuling (2004), the characteristic of political document is the formality of the language. While, the translation of government work report, on lexical, features with the word or expressions with Chinese characteristics and special cultural implications (e.g. "the important thought of Three Represents"); and in syntax, features with a variety of single sentences, more phrases and complex sentences, and the alternate use of active voice and passive voice, which inevitably makes the translation somewhat mechanical.

However, on the other side, there are many redeeming points in the translation of government work reports, and the use of cohesive devices is a worthy learning one by translators. Just as Lu Min said, "In my opinion, in the process of translating the political documents, the translator must master the spirit of the political documents and convey the meaning of the original text in plain English. Correctly interpreting the meaning of the political documents is the most basic translation criterion."(2002) In this paper, the author will compare the cohesive devices used in the government work reports and their English versions, aiming to conclude the similarities and differences between the government work reports and their translated versions from the perspective of cohesion, and mainly the paper intends to raise the awareness of the translator to pay attention to the intralingual understanding and the use of cohesive devices.

### COHESION THEORY

The term "discourse analysis" was first proposed by structuralist Zelling Harris in the early 1950s. In 1990s, influenced by the systemic- functional grammar of the Halliday, many Western linguists applied textual analysis theory into translation studies and achieved a series of research progress. In 1983, Brown and Yule found some limitations of Cohesion Theory of Halliday and Hasan. They pointed out that Halliday and Hasan take no notice of how the texts are understood by the speakers and writers.

According to the theory of Beaugrande and Dressier (1981), cohesion "is about way how the elements of the surface text, such as the actual words we hear or see mutually integrated with each other and in a certain order or sequence. "Cohesive ties signal the ideational interrelations in a text. Cohesive ties may

refer forward (cataphoric) or backward (anaphoric) in a text. Anaphora is the form of reference or presupposition that points back to some previous items in the text.

Markers of cohesion are cues connecting ideas in the text. Halliday and Hasan refer to two types of cohesion: grammatical and lexical. They subdivide grammatical cohesion into the categories of reference (i.e., anaphora), substitution, ellipsis, and conjunction; and lexical cohesion into the categories of repetition of the same item, synonymy, superordinate relationships, general items, and collocation.

In this paper, the authors mainly make some analysis, firstly, from the perspective of grammatical cohesion including reference, substitution and ellipsis, and secondly, from the perspective of lexical device including repetition, synonym and collocation.

### CASE STUDY

Due to the different features of Chinese and English language, it is difficult to realize equivalent translation. As an important political document, government work report need to be accurately translated to ensure translation quality. As a result, translators should have a full intralingual understanding of the government work report and are obliged to summarize the characteristics of different languages and then do the translation work with certain devices to achieve qualified translations.

### Grammatical Devices

Halliday divides cohesion into grammatical cohesion and lexical cohesion. There are four kinds of grammatical cohesion: reference, substitution, conjunction and ellipsis. In the government work report, conjunctions are used less, and the relation between sentences is mainly rely on semantic connection, therefor the more cohesive devices used are reference, substitution and ellipsis, the conjunctions will not discussed in this paper.

### Reference

As one of the most obvious cohesive devices, reference means that the explanation of one item shall rely on something else in a text. In Cohesion in English, Halliday and Hasan pointed out that reference items can be divided into exophoric reference and endophoric reference. The former one is a kind of context-dependent, that is to say the reader cannot understand what is said without the context of situation. However, it does not contribute to cohesion. Therefore, what is truly concerned about in this paper is endophoric reference. There are three kinds of references within the scope of endophoric, namely, personal reference, demonstrative reference and comparative reference. Compared with English, Chinese has the same classification of reference. Nevertheless, these two

languages belong to different language system. Therefore, although they are similar to some extent, they have different characteristics. In the following part, some examples chosen from the 2017 government work reports will be given.

(1) C.对守住不发生系统性金融风险的底线, 我们有信心和底气、有能力和办法。

E. We have the confidence, the ability, and the means to forestall systemic risks.

(2) C.我们一定要直面挑战, 敢于担当。

E. We must confront these challenges head-on, be ready to bear the weight of responsibility, and do our all to deliver.

The above examples show that there is a personal reference correspondence sometimes. In these examples,“我们”refers to the Chinese government. While “we” refers to the same government organization in the English version. Therefore, cohesion has been achieved in the Chinese and English versions in the same way in the above examples.

### Substitution

Substitution refers to the replacement of one element by another. As an important cohesive device, substitution has aroused interest among scholars. But they have different opinions on it. According to Halliday and Hasan, these two terminologies have different characteristics. They pointed out that substitution focuses on the relation between words or phrases but not between meanings. In addition, exophoric substitution rarely uses in the text. Because substitution is basically confined to the text and it always refers to something which has been said in the preceding text. But unlike substitution, reference item can be classified into exophoric and endophoric, and according to Halliday and Hasan, it may point in any direction and point to the previous part is just one possibility. Apart from that, the substitute item should have the same structural function with which it substitutes. However, there is no such rule in reference.

Substitution always occurs in spoken language rather than in written language, so compared with reference, it has been used with a lower frequency in government work report. In Cohesion in English (2001), Halliday and Hasan pointed out that substitute is a grammatical relation, so the types of it are defined grammatically rather than semantically. According to the grammatical function, there are three kinds of substitutions both in Chinese and English: nominal substitution, verbal substitution and clausal substitution. In the following section, nominal substitution will be introduced by the author.

(3) C.对偷排、造假<sup>的</sup>, 必须依法惩治; 对执法不力、姑息纵容<sup>的</sup>, 必须严肃追究; 对空气质量恶化、应对不力<sup>的</sup>, 必须严格问责。

E. Illegal dischargers and fraud must be punished in accordance with law. Officials who do a poor job in enforcing the law, knowingly allow environmental violations, or respond inadequately to worsening air quality will be held fully accountable.

In the example above,“的”in (3) a substitute some persons mentioned in the previous part. Like one/ones in English,“的”in Chinese can substitute only for an item which is itself head of nominal group. But although they have much in common, literal translation is not workable in most instances. However, sometimes the noun which is substituted can appear in the translated version, such as“的”is translated into "persons" in (3)E.

### Ellipsis

As mentioned before, ellipsis and substitution are very similar to each other and ellipsis is simply called "substitution by zero". Like substitution, ellipsis is a relation within the text and in most cases it is an anaphoric relation. While, it is noteworthy that as a place-maker for what is presupposed, the substitute (such as: one/ones; do/does) can be used as substitution, while such substitutes cannot find in ellipsis.

In addition, ellipsis will not cause any misunderstandings in comprehension for readers or listeners, because the omitted part always refers to something mentioned before. Therefore, in order to avoid repetition and produce a concise text, ellipsis is widely used in language. As one of the famous French linguists, Martinet pointed out that the "economy principle" plays an important role in the process of communication, because people tend to transfer more information with less effort (ZhuYongsheng, 2001:61).

(4) C.同主要大国协调合作得到加强, 同....., 同....., 同联合国等国际组织联系更加密切。

E. *China's* coordination and cooperation with other major countries were strengthened, its ....., its ....., and its interactions with the UN and other international organizations became closer.

In this example,“中国”as the subject of sentence is omitted in (4)C. But the omission of it will not cause any misunderstandings and interfere with the understanding of the sentence. However, it will cause misunderstandings in target language if "China" is omitted in (4) E. In English, the omission of the subject will be regard as grammar error. So in order to achieve smooth reading and accurate understanding of the sentence, the subject cannot be omitted in English.

### Lexical Device

As the last part of cohesive devices, lexical cohesion plays an important role in cohesive devices. According to the theory of Halliday and Hasan, lexical cohesion can be defined as "a sort of cohesive relation come into being by different choices of vocabulary or words" (2001:274).

### Repetition

Repetition is the repeated occurrence of a linguistic component. Lexical repetition can not only play the role of textual coherence, but also achieve rhetorical effects such as highlighting the theme and deepening the impression. As for the application of repetition, Chinese and English share a lot in common. Therefore, literal translation is workable in the following examples:

(5) C. 加强疾病预防体系和慢性病防控体系建设.....适应实施全面两孩政策, 加强生育医疗保健服务。

E. .... and *strengthen* the development of the disease prevention system and the chronic disease prevention and control system..... As the policy of allowing couples to have two children has been adopted, we need to *strengthen* our maternity medical and health care services.

In (5) C,“加强”occurs for two times, which stress what the government should do in a new year. In addition, the repeated words also play an important role in the aspect of cohesion. In (5) E, both of the repeated words are translated into "strengthen", which achieve the cohesion in a similar way. So in the process of translation, the literal translation is workable in the aspect of lexical repetition.

### Synonym

From a rhetorical point of view, synonyms can avoid repetition and monotony. From the textual point of view, the appearance of two or more synonyms aims to explain the meaning of another word with one word, or to strengthen the tone. Here is an example from the 2017 government work report.

(6) C. 重要领域和关键环节改革取得突破性进展, 供给侧结构性改革初见成效。

E. Breakthroughs were made in reforms in major sectors and key links, and initial success was achieved in supply-side structural reform.

In this example,“关键”and“重要”have similar meanings in(6)C, so the cohesive relationship is achieved by synonym. In (6) E, these two words are translated into "crucial" and "important" respectively, which has a corresponding relationship with the Chinese meanings. So in (6) E, the cohesive relationship is also realized by the help of synonym.

### Collocation

Repetition can be avoided by choosing different words according to different combinations. For example, the word "建设" was repeatedly used for 69 times in 2017 government work report, but it was not translated as "building" or "construction" only, such as:

(7)C. 制定实施生态文明 建设目标评价考核办法, 建设国家生态文明试验区。

E. We formulated and introduced measures for assessing progress made in ecological *improvement*, and *established* national pilot zones for ecological conservation.

In this example, the word“建设”appears twice in the Chinese version, the first one is used as a noun and translated into “improvement” in the English version, while the second one is used as a verb and is translated into “established”.

“Improve” means to become better than before or to make something or somebody better than before in this example, “生态文明建设” refers to make the ecological environment better and healthy on the basis of the original ecosystem, therefore, the word “improvement” used here is closer to the original meaning. And “Establish” means to set up (an organization, system, or set of rules) on a firm or permanent basis. Here, “试验区” in this example refers to an experimental area or a testing area which is on the permanent basis and intended to continue. The above are proper collocated. It can be easily seen that there is a systematic relationship between these lexical items and they generate a cohesive force. So does in (7) E. So it can be concluded that collocation must be considered when doing translation work especially from Chinese to English.

### CONCLUSION

With the development of translation activities, the translation of traditional micro expressions is becoming more and more difficult to adapt to the requirements of its development. However, discourse analysis, as a new means, represents a new trend in translation studies. Cohesion is one of the most important methods in discourse analysis, and it is the most effective method of discourse analysis in translation. In Chinese political documents, the Chinese language with its own characteristics is different from English in cohesive devices, so textual cohesion theory is a necessary tool to guide the translation of political documents. In 2017 the government work report and its English version, the use of cohesion theory could be found throughout the text, each kind of cohesion can be reflected in the translation or translation process, effectively avoiding the repetition of words and phrases

in ambiguity, loose structure and other aspects. Cohesive devices play an important role in accurately conveying the original ideas and improving the quality of translation. It can be seen that discourse cohesion theory broadens the field of research and practice of translators.

Based on Cohesion Theory of Halliday and Hasan, this paper introduces the differences and similarities in cohesion between Chinese and English language and adopts the 2017 government work report and its English version as research materials. However, despite the findings discussed in this paper about the cohesive devices used in the two versions of the 2017 government work report, there are some limitations, such as less examples for analyzing and the lack of in-depth analysis and discussion.

In conclusion, this paper aims to provide some valuable suggestions for the learners who are engaged in C-E translation or political documents researches through a comparative study. In addition, the combination of the study of cohesion and translation are worth exploring in the future.

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