

# A Corpus-based Study of Government Reports and National Image Construction from the Perspective of Critical Discourse Analysis

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## Abstract

Shaping a good national image is crucial to the overall development of a country in the future. Government reports and their translation version are important research documents for people at home and abroad to understand a country's national conditions. Based on the corpus-based approach and the theory of critical discourse analysis, this paper investigates the linguistic features and textual effect of the translated version of the report on the work of the government (2022) and State of the Union Address (2022). The investigation shows that 1) compared with the State of the Union Address, the English translation of the report on the work of the government adopts more adjectives, nouns, verbs and other notional words, and uses more passive sentences and high-value modal verbs. All these have constructed a positive national image with practical spirit, and shape a country with the quality of down-to-earth, and approachable but dignified. 2) It is argued that the image shaped by the English translation of the report on the work of the government are the reflection of the Chinese government at the level of linguistic symbols, which is the embodiment of translator's faithfulness to the original text.

## Keywords

CDA, Government report, English translation, National image, Corpus.

## 1. Introduction

Image refers to people's beliefs, ideas and impressions about something [1], and national image is the combination of a country's own cognition and that of other actors in the international system. A good national image helps the world better understand contemporary China. Therefore, many Chinese scholars point out that the overall construction of China's national image is an important subject in the context of globalization [2]. Over the past 40 years of reform and opening up, China's economy has grown rapidly and its international status has risen significantly. Besides, China has promoted itself to establish a good national image in the world by actively participating in international affairs, assuming international responsibilities, maintaining world peace and development, and promoting the common well-being of all mankind. In particular, since the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, China has entered a new historical period, during which China's comprehensive national strength and international influence have been continuously improved, and China's international status has undergone historic changes.

Hu & Li pointed out that the construction of China's national image includes material and symbolic levels [3]. The former includes China's political system, economic strength, military strength, natural resources, diplomatic activities, and industrial and commercial products, while the latter involves China's ideology, value orientation, media, and literary works, etc. Among them, translation has always been the main means of national image construction, such as the translated versions of literary works, films, news and political documents. The image of China created by the translation of literary works can exert a lasting and subtle influence on

foreign audiences, thus affecting their views and cognition of China. The translation of political literature and news is often used to state the thoughts and viewpoints of a country or a political party, which can directly spread the Chinese image it constructs to foreign audiences. Therefore, it plays a prominent role in the construction of national image. For example, Chinese and Western government work reports, as one of the main means to explain the domestic and international situation of each country, as well as various government policies and measures, attract wide attention from all over the world every year.

The government work report, usually available in English, is a form of official document in China. The spread of its translated version overseas will help to change the situation that China's international image is passively shaped by other countries or media, so as to correct the negative impact caused by the non-objective description of China's image in the Western world. Therefore, the government work report plays an important role in the dissemination and construction of China's image in the new era. To sum up, based on critical discourse analysis (CDA) theory and corpus translation research, this paper studied the English translation of the government work report and the *State of the Union Address*, and analyzed the national image portrayed by the two documents.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Critical Discourse Analysis

With an emphasis on the relationship between sign and meaning, critical linguistics studies the relationship between language, power and ideology. Ding & Liao pointed out that CDA aims to reveal the influence of ideology on discourse through the surface form of language [4]. In terms of translation practice, Tian believes that translation is not only the conversion of the meaning of two words, but also a way for translators to participate in social activities, express their will, and achieve their goals [5]. This understanding of the nature of translation can be found in the theory of CDA which studies discourse as social practice. CDA attempts to reveal hidden relationships between discourse and political power [6] or ideological motivations in discourse [7]. As a linguistic tool, CDA aims to critically interpret the text, analyze the structure of language through language interaction situations and wider social context, and discover the social meaning expressed in the discourse [8].

At the same time, considering its focus on political power and ideology, CDA is an effective theoretical method when studying translation ideology [9]. Many studies focus on the English translation of diplomatic discourse and political discourse from the perspective of critical discourse analysis [10,11]. In conclusion, based on critical discourse analysis, this paper discusses the construction of China's national image created by the English translation of the report on *the work of the government*.

### 2.2. Research on translation and National Image construction

To enhance the country's cultural soft power is a new concept put forward by the CPC Central Committee against the backdrop of extensive and profound changes in contemporary China and the world. In this historical context, the study of China's image has attracted more and more attention from the academic circles. The research on national image started from the disciplines of international relations, politics, and communication. Due to its direct influence on national image, media is often regarded as the main means to construct national image [12, 13, 14]. At present, the research on China's national image mainly discusses the construction of China's external image from the perspectives of communication, political science, sociology, translation and international relations [3, 15]. Some studies have been conducted either through analyzing the image of China created by foreign literary works from the perspective of comparative literature, or analyzing the role of translation in the construction of China's image. However, it

can be summarized that from the perspective of research objects, current research theme on national image is mainly focused on media and literary works, or focuses on China's national image shaped by other countries. Foreign translation of political literature is an important part of the party's theoretical propaganda work. At present, more and more studies are concerned with the translation of political literature and the self-shaping of China's image. For example, some studies analyzed the image of China through the English translation of Xi Jinping: The Governance of China, the translation of diplomatic discourse, and the report on *the work of the government* [16]. However, most studies focus on the linguistic features, translation strategies and methods of Chinese political translations, and few involve comparative studies of Chinese and Western political literature.

At the same time, more and more studies have introduced corpus statistical methods to investigate the corpus data in the original and translated texts. This not only provides tangible linguistic evidence for ideological changes in the context of the target language, but also helps to quickly recognize the differences between the discourse subjects represented by the original text and the translated text in terms of political stance, power relations, emotional attitudes, and core interests [9]. Existing research on China's national image is mainly qualitative studies. Corpus-based translation and Chinese image studies aim to use corpus technology to analyze the linguistic features of a large number of translated texts, systematically study the Chinese image presented by translated texts, and explore the role of translation in the construction of China's image.

In view of the above background, this paper intends to establish an English translation corpus of the report on *the work of the government* and a corpus of the original text of the *State of the Union Address*, and analyze the national image created by these two documents from the perspectives of high-frequency words, personal pronouns, and modal verbs.

### 3. Research Design

Political literature is often used to state the thoughts and views of a country or a political party and plays an important role in shaping the image of a country or a nation. To construct a political discourse system through the external translation of political discourse is the realistic task and important mission faced by external publicity translators, and the new responsibility entrusted by the era.

In recent years, Xi Jinping: The Governance of China and the report on *the work of the government* delivered by the Premier of The State Council have aroused wide public concern. As an official document, the report on *the work of the government* is comprehensive and objective. Its translated version is not only an important way for the international community to understand China, but also an important way to build up China's national image to the international community. To make the analysis more convincing, the report on *the work of the government* are compared with the State of Union Address, which illustrates the domestic and foreign situations faced by the United States and the policy measures taken by the their government.

#### 3.1. Research questions

In view of the above background, this paper addresses the following three research questions: (1) Compared with the State of Union Address, what are the features of the report on *the work of the government* (2022) in the application of vocabulary and sentence structure? (2) What are the features of the Chinese government's image shaped by the translated version of the report on *the work of the government* (2022)? (3) What are the internal reasons for the construction of Chinese government image in the English translation of the 2022 report on *the work of the government*?

### 3.2. Research corpus

Compared with the 2022 U.S. *State of the Union Address*, this paper intends to use the corpus-assisted translation analysis method and the corpus analysis software Antconc3.5.7 to analyze the image of China created by the report on *the work of the government* in 2022 from the perspective of the application of high-frequency words, personal pronouns and modal verbs.

## 4. Results and Discussion

### 4.1. Analysis of high frequency words

First of all, high-frequency content words in the translated version of the report on *the work of the government* were selected as the research object of this paper. High-frequency content words tend to present a certain image to readers, thus affecting their perception. Readers tend to focus on words that appear more frequently. After psychological integration of high-frequency words in the report on *the work of the government*, readers can form a whole judgment, which will directly affect people's views and impressions on the subject of the text, and ultimately form an impression on the Chinese government. Meanwhile, high-frequency nouns also reflect the issues, priorities and topics that the speaker is concerned about from the side, while high-frequency verbs describe the frequent behaviors or measures taken by the speaker, which can reflect the actions taken by the government.

With the help of AntConc software, we obtained 20 high-frequency words from Table 1, including nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs.

**Table 1.** Comparison of high-frequency content words

English translation of the report on <i>the work of the government</i>		<i>State of the Union Address</i>	
High frequency content words	Frequency	High frequency content words	Frequency
development	117	have	87
people	73	is	71
all	64	more	52
more	64	America	47
government	63	as	41
be	60	be	41
new	59	so	39
ensure	55	let	37
improve	55	Americans	35
support	53	people	33
promote	51	year	33
China	48	get	30
services	48	all	28
work	47	know	28
enterprises	45	up	28
year	43	world	28
major	42	do	27
party	39	has	24
policies	39	make	24
continue	36	was	24

The government work report is mainly a summary of the government's work over the past year. According to Table 1, we can find that some high-frequency content words in these two documents have a strong similarity. Words such as "people", "government", "China", "work", and "year" appear frequently in the translated version of the report on *the work of the*

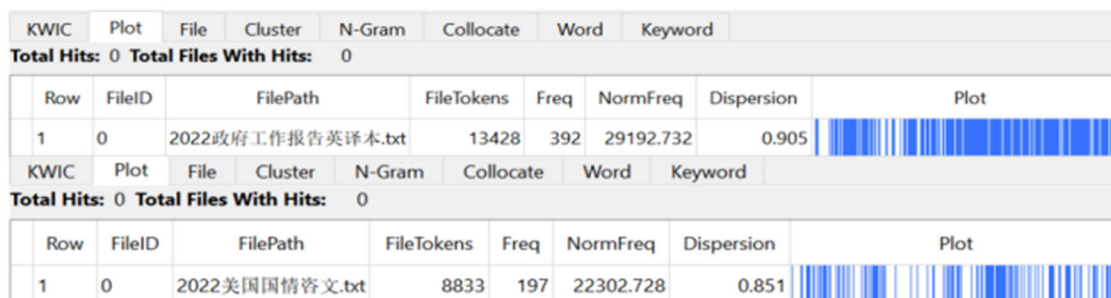
*government*, and words such as “people”, “America”, “Americans”, “year”, and “do” are frequently used in the *State of the Union address*. We can easily find that the word “be” appears very frequently in the report on *the work of the government*. By further analyzing the context of the word “be”, it can be found that the report on *the work of the government* often uses the passive voice, which indicates that translators adopt a translation habit more in line with foreign audiences. In addition, adjectives and nouns such as “development”, “economic”, “all”, “more”, “services”, “enterprises”, “party” and “polices” appear frequently in the translated version of the report on *the work of the government*. Further searching for the context of these words (KWIC) in the corpus analysis software, we can conclude that the Chinese government has paid attention to practical issues such as development, economy, public services, enterprise development, and related policy implementation in the past year, and emphasized that the people of all ethnic groups, governments at all levels have fulfilled their duties to deal with various difficulties and challenges. Under the leadership of CPC, China has achieved the grand goal of building a well-off society in an all-round way, which shows that the Chinese government has always focused on economic construction to develop socialism with Chinese characteristics, and that its concerns are closely related to community-level services and people’s livelihood. In contrast, the corpus analysis software showed that most of the top 20 words in the *State of the Union address* were verbs, with very few nouns and adjectives expressing the subject. Combined with the context of high-frequency word “world” in the *State of the Union address*, it can be found that the U.S. government pays more attention to macro-level issues such as world security and world peace.

The function of verbs is to express action, tendency, intention, judgment, possibility, action, indication, mental activity, etc. Verbs can be more specific about complex things or actions. According to Table 1, we can find that the high-frequency verbs in the translated version of the report on *the work of the government* are substantive verbs such as “ensure”, “improve”, “support”, “promote”, “work”, and “continue”. These verbs have a positive meaning, which not only shows that the Chinese government has been committed to various guarantees for the society and people’s lives during the epidemic, but also emphasizes that China has adopted effective measures to improve and solve problems, thus build a positive image of the Chinese government as responsible, active, and down-to-earth.

In the *State of the Union address*, the top 20 high-frequency verbs are mainly divided into linking verbs expressing the relationship between things, such as “is”, “be”, and “was”, and substantive verbs with general meanings, such as “do”, “let”, “make”, “have”, “get”, “know”, etc. This shows that the U.S. government uses more tenses to highlight the results of one event and uses imperative sentences to arouse the emotions of the audience. Obviously, these words cannot well express the specific image of the U.S. government. Verbs that appear frequently in the *State of the Union address* also include many expressions of mental activities and attitudes, such as “think”, “know” and “want”. Psychoactive and attitudinal verbs express subjective views and attitudes and weaken the emphasis on national identity. Frequent use of these verbs will make readers feel that the government is not pragmatic.

#### 4.2. Analysis of personal pronoun

Personal pronouns are widely used in English political discourse [17]. AntConc software analysis results show that the personal pronoun “we” appears frequently in the translated version of the report on *the work of the government* (frequency 392/the fifth most frequent word) and in the *State of the Union Address* (frequency 197/the fifth most frequent word). The extensive use of the personal pronoun “we” shortens the distance between the speaker and the audience, making the audience feel more cordial and winning their support. AntConc’s Plot function was applied to analyze the application position and frequency of the first-person pronoun plural “we” in these two documents. See Fig.1. for details.



**Figure 1.** Comparison of the frequency and distribution of “we”

From Fig.1., we can find that the frequency of “we” in the translated version of the report on *the work of the government* is significantly higher than that of the *State of the Union Address*. However, there are not many “we” in the original text (11 times in total) in the report on *the work of the government*, which is because the subject “we” in the original text is often omitted due to the frequent use of non-subject clauses in Chinese. When subject-less sentences composed of “to”, “must” and “should” are frequently used with content verbs, translators often translate these sentences as English active structures with “we” as the subject. In the context of major political discourse such as the two sessions, where the rapporteurs report on the past year’s work on behalf of the central People’s government, “we” means engaging the audience so that they can understand how the report relates to their own interests. The English translation of the report on *the work of the government* is intended to inform foreign readers of China’s domestic and foreign policies, as well as the Chinese government’s stance on relevant international issues. Therefore, the frequent use of “we” will make listeners feel that the opinions or propositions expressed in the report on *the work of the government* are the opinions of groups or institutions, and they are the crystallization of collective wisdom, thus reducing the subjectivity of the report.

The top 10 high-frequency verbs that collocate with “we” in these two documents were further analyzed, as shown in Table 2.

**Table 2.** High-frequency verbs collocated with “we”

English translation of the report on <i>the work of the government</i>		<i>State of the Union Address</i>	
High frequency content words	Frequency	High frequency content words	Frequency
will	274	are	47
must	16	have	31
should	15	will	28
have	9	can	16
continued	5	do	16
took	4	were	5
advanced	3	must	5
made	3	need	4
promoted	3	stand	3
remain	3	know	3

According to the above table, we can find that “we” in the report on *the work of the government* often matches with substantive verbs. In addition to what’s shown in table 1, “we” also matches with past tense content verbs such as “boosted”, “deepened”, “ensured”, “implemented”,

“strengthened”, “achieved”, “consolidated”, “developed”, “established”, “improved”. Through the above collocations, we can find the diversity and accuracy of the translation in presenting the work carried out by the Chinese government in the past year. The collocation of “we” with the past tense of these substantive verbs makes the translated version of the report on *the work of the government* more dynamic, portraying a positive international image that is full of vigor, vitality, and promises and deeds.

Meanwhile, modal verbs such as “will”, “must” and “should” are used in the translated version to express that the Chinese government will continue to promote economic and social development and strive to achieve the goal of building a strong socialist country. The combination of “we” and the above verbs shows Chinese government’s firm determination to act. In the *State of the Union address*, “we”(s) are mostly collocated with modal verbs, linking verbs or verbs with more general meanings. Although there are also substantive verbs such as “use”, “won”, “achieved”, “see”, “built”, etc., they are used less frequently. The national image of the U.S. government cannot be directly constructed.

### 4.3. Analysis of modal verb

Modal verbs are used to express modal meanings related to possibility and necessity [18]. The Word function of Antconc is used to calculate the frequency of application of the affirmative form of modal verbs in these two documents. The results are shown in Table 3.

**Table 3.** Application of modal verbs

Modal verbs	<i>The report on the work of the government/ Fre</i>	<i>the State of the Union Address/Fre</i>
must	26	5
have to	0	8
need	8	15
Count	34 (0.28%)	28 (0.29%)
will	352	45
would	0	12
should	34	5
Count	386 (3.21%)	62 (0.66%)
can	6	48
may	0	6
could	0	5
might	0	2
Count	6 (0.05%)	61 (0.65%)
Full count	426 (3.55%)	151 (1.61%)

Modal verbs can be divided into three categories: epistemic, deontic and dynamic [19]. According to the intensity division of modal verbs [20], they can be divided into high-value modal verbs (“must” “ought to”, “need” and “have to”), medium-value modal verbs (“will” “would”, “should”), and low-value modal verbs (“can”, “could”, “may” and “might”). High-value modal verbs generally express speaker’s subjective orientation and determination, conveying a coercive attitude [20]; Low-value modal verbs are euphemistic, indicating that the speaker is trying to shorten the distance; The medium value is located in the middle, giving some guidance to the audience without losing a friendly attitude.

According to Table 3, the frequency of modal verbs in the translated version of the report on *the work of the government* is slightly higher than that of the *State of the Union address*, with the

former accounting for 3.55% and the latter for 1.61%. This is mainly because the frequency of medium value modal verbs in the English translation of the report on *the work of the government* is significantly higher than that of the U.S. *State of the Union Address*, especially the words “will” and “should”. The frequency of high-value modal verbs in the English translation of the report on *the work of the government* is almost the same as that of the U.S. *State of the Union address*, but the word “must” is used more frequently than the *State of the Union address*, which also expresses the strong determination of the Chinese government to take specific measures; The frequency and proportion of low-value modal verbs are significantly lower than those in the *State of the Union address*. As mentioned above, low-value modal verbs are euphemistic, indicating that the speaker is trying to narrow the distance between the speaker and the listener. However, the report on *the work of the government* is a form of official document of the government of the People’s Republic of China, which aims to use important facts and data to reflect the achievements and main work done in various aspects. Therefore, translators rarely use low values modal verbs with uncertainty in the English translation of government reports. On the contrary, the proportion of middle-value modal verbs in the translated version of the report on *the work of the government* is significantly higher than that in the U.S. *State of the Union Address*, which indicates that the tone of the report on *the work of the government* is relatively compromised. Therefore, it is easier to be accepted by the audience, and creates a peaceful yet majestic image of the government. Speeches are an important way for the U.S. government and the president to gain public support. Low-value modal verbs are used frequently in the *State of the Union address*, which can mobilize the emotions of the audience. However, this weakens the authority of the government’s discourse and is not conducive to the construction of the country’s image.

#### 4.4. Construction of China’s national image

Based on the above analysis, it can be concluded that compared with the *State of the Union Address*, the English translation of the report on *the work of the government* uses more adjectives, nouns, verbs and other content words, passive sentences, the personal pronoun “we”, high-value and medium-value modal verbs, etc, thus constructing a responsible, faithful and resolute national image. This is in contrast to the image of the U.S. government and country portrayed in the U.S. *State of the Union address*. So what is the internal reasons for the formation of the image of the Chinese government in the English translation of the report on *the work of the government*? This section will discuss in detail.

First of all, in order to promote economic construction and social development and realize the goal of building a powerful socialist country, the Chinese government has been making great efforts to reform, and has carried out a lot of fruitful work in the fields of economic and social development. The level of economic development and comprehensive strength have reached unprecedented heights. As a result, the Chinese government has won widespread praise from the international community and left a deep impression on the international community of its hard work. In particular, the achievements of the Chinese government in responding to the epidemic are obvious to all people in the world, and the China has also provided assistance to other countries within its capacity. At the same time, the successful holding of the 2022 Beijing Winter Olympics has also enhanced the national prestige and helped us establish a good international image. In this sense, the characteristics of the Chinese government described in the English translation of the report on *the work of the government* are the true reflection or refraction of the Chinese government’s actions at the level of language symbols.

Secondly, due to the authoritativeness of the source text of the report on *the work of the government*, the translator will be faithful to the original text. In addition, the requirements for faithfulness and accuracy in the translation of political documents are usually higher than those in the translation of other types of documents. As the largest developing country in the world,



China faces many challenges in economic construction, reform and social development. In order to deal with these challenges, the Chinese government must take practical and effective measures. Since then, the translator has used a lot of substantive verbs and high-value modal verbs, which to a certain extent is a manifestation of faithfulness to the original text, and on the other hand, it also reflects the strong determination and confidence of the Chinese government to take specific measures.

## 5. Conclusion

Using the corpus method, this paper makes a comparative analysis of the language features of the translated version of the report on *the work of the government* and the *State of the Union Address* from the aspects of high-frequency words, personal pronouns and modal verbs. On this basis, it discusses the construction of China's national image.

The results show that 1) compared with the *State of the Union Address*, the English translation of the report on *the work of the government* adopts adjectives, nouns, verbs and other notional words, passive sentences, personal pronoun "we", high-value and medium value modal verbs, creating a positive national image with practical spirit. 2) It is argued that the image shaped by the English translation of the report on *the work of the government* are the reflection of the Chinese government at the level of linguistic symbols, which is not only the embodiment of translator's faithfulness to the original text, but also relates to the grammatical differences between English and Chinese and translation strategies.

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