

# Images of the Chinese government projected in its work reports: Transformation through translation



Hailing Yu <sup>a,\*</sup>, Canzhong Wu <sup>b</sup>

<sup>a</sup> School of Foreign Languages and International Studies, Hunan University, 2 South Lushan Road, Changsha 410082, China

<sup>b</sup> Department of Linguistics, Macquarie University, New South Wales 2109, Australia

Received 15 June 2018; received in revised form 5 September 2018; accepted 11 September 2018

Available online 22 September 2018

## Abstract

The article investigates the transformation of the image of the Chinese government in the process of translating its Annual Work Reports (AWR) into English. The focus is the linguistic choice of Agency, which specifies whether an event is presented as happening by itself or being caused by an external agent. By analyzing both the Chinese AWRs and their translations diachronically (2001, 2006, 2011 and 2016), the study finds that the modest and inclusive image of the government in the Chinese reports is often transformed into a competent and responsible government in the English translations through consistent linguistic choices of presenting the work as either happenings or doings. Both the linguistic shifts and image transformation, as is argued in the article, relate more to the context than to the linguistic constraints.

© 2018 Elsevier B.V. All rights reserved.

**Keywords:** Annual Work Report; Agency; Image; Translation; Chinese government

## 1. Introduction

Each year in March, the Chinese premier, on behalf of the State Council, delivers the government's Annual Work Report (AWR) to deputies of the National People's Congress (NPC), the largest parliamentary body in the world. Delivered in Chinese during the session, the AWR is soon after translated into other major languages in the world (most importantly, English), and the translations are designed to be internationalized and mass-mediatized, indicating the government's awareness of the AWR's function as an important window for China watching (Wang, 2003). The translating is usually done by selected Chinese translators under strict governmental supervision, and priority is given to the ideological correctness (Wang, 2014), as these translated discourses are considered important ways of national image building (Yang, 2015). Given the active role of the Chinese government in this process,<sup>1</sup> this study intends to investigate the use of language in the AWRs and their English translations in projecting the images of the Chinese government, and in transmitting the intended information to the intended audience in a globalized world (Bandar, 2012).

\* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: [hailing.yu@hnu.edu.cn](mailto:hailing.yu@hnu.edu.cn), [hailingyu13@gmail.com](mailto:hailingyu13@gmail.com) (H. Yu), [canzhong.wu@mq.edu.au](mailto:canzhong.wu@mq.edu.au) (C. Wu).

<sup>1</sup> It should be pointed out that some foreign media may not solely rely on the translations issued by the Chinese government. Correspondents of these media may produce their own summary of the AWR. But up to now this has been done sporadically, and in most cases, the official translation by the Chinese government is adopted.

This study is a critical discourse analysis of the Chinese AWRs and their English translations from the perspective of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), with the focus on the linguistic choices of Agency (the external cause of the process), and the images of the Chinese government thereby recreated. It adopts an analytical tool named SysFan, which supports systemic functional analysis. The findings show that the context of translation, such as the positioning of the target readers, the purpose of translation, and the change of spoken into written mode, makes a significant contribution to the transformation of the image of the Chinese government as well as the production of the translations.

Compared with previous studies on the translation of political discourses, this study is distinctive in a number of ways. Geographically, the present study is concerned with translation of political discourses outside rather than within the boundaries of Europe (Calzada Pérez, 2001; Rundle and Sturge, 2010); temporally, it investigates the data from a diachronic rather than a synchronic perspective (Romagnuolo, 2009; Schäffner, 1997, 2004, 2012; Schäffner and Bassnett, 2010). Moreover, it examines a translational phenomenon that is strictly source-oriented: source-initiated, source-supervised and source-promoted. This is contrary to most previous studies where translations are regarded as “facts of the target culture” (Touy, 1995:29).

The article will first give an account of China's image building project and the role of the AWR. It will then present the data and analytical framework of the study, which is followed by the analysis and discussion. Finally, the article will be concluded.

## 2. China's image building and the AWR

Although there has been increasing coverage of China in the international media since its accession to the World Trade Organization in 2001, the image of China on the international stage is generally believed to be unfavorable (Peng, 2004; Xiang, 2013). This has led to two reactions from the Chinese government. Firstly, China has developed a deep distrust of foreign media, especially Western media, who are criticized for presenting a maliciously distorted account of Chinese realities (He, 2005; Li, 1996). Secondly, the government has launched a series of image-building projects, including the promotion of China's own English-language media (Alvaro, 2015; Hu and Ji, 2012), establishment of overseas propaganda departments (Wang, 2003), and government-initiated and supervised translating activities.

National image-building has become a more practical and urgent task for China in recent years (Barr, 2012; Ramo, 2007; Xie and Page, 2013), especially since the country launched its ‘One Belt, One Road’ initiative in 2013. The Chinese president has explicitly expressed his concern for China's image building for the foreign audience on many occasions, and urged publicity departments of all levels to help develop an objective and correct understanding of China (Wu, 2017). In this context, translations of the AWR into other languages are seen as an important tool to project a desirable image of the country to the world.

The concept of image in this study is defined from a linguistic, and particularly systemic functional perspective: image is the semantic consequence of recurrent linguistic choices in the source texts and in the English translations. According to Hasan (2009a), choices made in the process of speaking/writing are not irregular or accidental, although they may not necessarily be the result of conscious design. There tends to be a recurrent pattern in the selected ways of meaning, and this recurrent pattern leads to a semantic consequence, which provides a way to account for the relationship between linguistic variation at the lexicogrammatical level and differences in the context of speaking/writing.

According to China's legislation system, the NPC is the largest institution of power where people exercise their right in governing the country. The premier of the State Council is required to deliver a work report to the representatives attending the congress, who then judge whether the government has fully fulfilled its responsibility in the past year and provided a feasible work plan for the ongoing year. Such a tradition started in 1954, and the AWR is now a highly formulated discourse with relatively stable topics, schema, and style. There are two compulsory parts of each year's AWR: a review of the work done in the past year, and a plan for the ongoing year where major tasks to be undertaken are stated. Occasionally there is a short section in between, which summarizes the goals still to be achieved in the ongoing year.

As one of the most important political documents in China, the AWR is ritualized and widely published by the Chinese government, especially over the last two decades. Domestically, the delivery of the AWR by the premier is broadcast live via China Central Television, and watched by millions of people (for example, the number of on-line audience reached 13.22 million in 2018, according to a report by CCTV<sup>2</sup>). Apart from the whole report that is released after the NPC, there are constant discussions, summaries, commentaries and interpretations of the report in the newspapers and on the internet. Usually, translations of the AWR into other major languages of the world are picked up by the international media, which view the report as an up-to-date indicator of the political trends and economic strategies of the Chinese government.

<sup>2</sup> China Central Television (CCTV). 2018. “央视完成十三届全国人大一次会议第五次全体会议直播” [CCTV Held Live Broadcast of the Thirteenth National People's Congress of People's Republic of China]. Accessed on August 28, 2018. <http://www.cctv.cn/2018/03/20/ARTIAsYR51au9Y0Ofz0iHVac180320.shtml>.

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/11009043>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/11009043>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)