

# A Comparative Analysis of the Chinese and English Version of 2022 Chinese Government Work Report Guided by Functional Stylistics

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## Abstract

The English translations of Chinese government work reports constitute an important channel for forming English readers' viewpoint on China. However previous researches in the field of functional stylistics focus less attention on the English translations than what they deserve. This article adopted three grammatical features borrowed from systemic-functional grammar to analyze the stylistic features and effects in two excerpts taken from 2022 Chinese government work report. The research find that the English version showed striking similarities to its Chinese source text in terms of those three features. This research would contribute to researches intended to examine the stylistic equivalence between source and target texts and provide some insight on conveying Chinese messages to the world.

## Keywords

Functional stylistics; Chinese government work report; English translation; Comparative analysis.

## 1. Introduction

Chinese government has been publishing reports on the work of governments every year for 68 years and since those documents serve both as a review of work done by the Chinese government in the previous year and a plan for the next year in economic, political, social and international and other aspects, they are definitely clear windows through which readers witness China's development led by the Communist Party of China(CPC). The English versions of Chinese government work report therefore play an indispensable role in bringing the real images of China to the world by faithfully rendering the original Chinese version into English "equivalents".

The notion of equivalence resulted from linguistic explanations for translation[1]. In China Yanfu translated *Evolution and Ethics* guided by his tripartite translation theory of "faithfulness, expressive, and elegance"; Western translator Eugene Nida stressed the "functional equivalence" principle and stated that "correspondence in meaning must have priority over correspondence in style"[2]. Yanfu's overemphasis on elegance led to a version far from equivalent which could be brought about by combining faithfulness and expressiveness together;[1] and Nida's goal of equivalent response had been dismissed as implausible[2]. Both of them have ignored the important role of style's meaning-making potential.

Since "Various forms, patterns, and levels that constitute linguistic structures are an important index of the function of the text. The text's functional significance as discourse acts in turn as a gateway to its interpretation"[3]. Style variation thus might well lead to different interpretations. Stylistic analysis, which aims at "deriving insights of linguistic structure and function"[3], is useful in examining the styles of Chinese and English versions of Chinese government work reports.

Functionalist stylistics in its broad sense, is a branch of stylistics based upon a functional perception of language and is regarded as distinct from formal stylistics. It entails various research models, among which the model founded by M.A.K.Halliday might be the most popular as the term functionalist stylistics refers to Halliday's model in its narrow sense[4]. In this paper, the term is used in its narrow sense. The functional or functionalist stylistics, an approach to stylistic research guided by the M.A.K.Halliday's systemic-functional grammar, is concerned about "the ways in which formal properties are used pragmatically[5]". It includes social and cultural milieus into consideration along with contexts in texts and therefore constitutes "a powerful method for understanding the ways in which all sorts of realities are constructed through language[5]". This paper intends to compare the stylistic features displayed in the selected excerpts from Chinese and English versions of 2022 Chinese government work reports, by adopting the functional stylistic model based on Halliday's notion of three metafunctions of language.

## 2. Literature Review

Functionalist or functional stylistics did not receive much attention until an influential paper named *Linguistic Function and Literal Style: An Inquiry into the Language of William Golding's The Inheritors* by Halliday was shared at the literary stylistic seminar in Italy. In that paper Halliday emphasized the value of metafunctions of language in exploring literary style, as the demands we make on language are "derived, ultimately from a small number of headings[6]". Halliday then illustrated his notion of three metafunctions: ideational function, interpersonal function, and textual function with a brief excerpt from *Through the Looking-Glass, What Alice Found There*. In the second part of his essay, he discussed the criteria to determine whether some linguistic patterns are stylistically relevant or not, stating that deviations that were almost seen as "prominence par excellence" are "rarely found and often not relevant", and that either deviation or deflection is "expressible in quantitative terms"[6]. While decoding the meaning of *The Inheritors*, Halliday interpreted the transitivity features found in his three pieces of selected excerpts by relating those features to three levels of context: make-believing world in the story, the theme of this story, and the humankind. In this way, Halliday provides a model for stylistic analysis from the perspective of systemic-functional grammar.

The searching results for "functionalist stylistics" and "functional stylistics" through Semantic Scholar shown that most articles in the last 10 years focus on applying the the Hallidayan systemic-functional grammar into the analysis of literary works[7][8], for example, in the article, "Corpus Functional Stylistic Analysis of Modal Verbs in Major Barbara and Its Chinese Versions", the author used modality in systematic functional linguistics as the theoretical framework to compare the modal system and interpersonal relationships of two Chinese versions of *Major Barbara*[9], and in "From Functional to Cognitive Grammar in Stylistic Analysis of Golding's *The Inheritors*" the researcher adopted a different perspective--cognitive grammar to show the similarities and differences between this two models in interpreting the meaning of the same novel[10]. A few articles employed systemic-functional grammar in analyzing students' works[11].

In China the most cited articles concerning functional stylistics are mostly appraisals on Halliday's pioneering paper *Linguistic Function and Literal Style: An Inquiry into the Language of William Golding's The Inheritors*[12][13][14]. Through CNKI search engine, functional stylistics researches published on prestigious journals in the last 10 years pay much attention to functional stylistic analysis of contemporary English novels[15][16], take "Ulysses At Bay: Functional Stylistic Analysis Of Joyce's Short Story Two Gallants" as an example, the author examined the expansion clause complexes in two gallants at three levels: taxis, logic-semantic relation and presentational sequencing to reveal the importance of stylistic features achieved

by Joyce's combining clauses together in developing a materially and spiritually troubled character[17].

To sum up, the functional stylistics is a well testified approach in identifying stylistic features and interpreting the effects of such features. However most research focus on its application into literary works, seemingly overlooking non-canonical texts, like political reports. This paper will try to apply the functional stylistics into the stylistic analysis of two pieces of excerpts from 2022 Chinese original government work report and its English counterpart.

### **3. Research Questions**

This article intends to compare the stylistic features and effects of the original Chinese version of 2022 government work report and its English version from the perspective of functional stylistics. For this end the article will solve two problems: first what are the stylistic features and effects in the original Chinese report, and second what are those in the English translation.

### **4. Theoretical Framework**

This article is based upon Halliday's notion of three metafunctions of language: ideational, interpersonal and textual functions. According to Halliday, the first function refers to the fact that we use language to embody our experiences of the real world including our experience of internal consciousnesses and acts of speaking and understanding; the second is concerned about all uses of language to express comments, attitudes and the like and also about relationships between communicators; the third indicates language's ability to create texts and it is therefore internal to language[6].

These three metafunctions are realized by a variety of linguistic systems of choice. Since three metafunctions are simultaneously realized in texts, then "any study of a text's meaning potential can make good use of all of them, offering a more robust analysis." [5] So this article is going to explore the stylistic features and their effects by analyzing the transitivity, modality and thematic choices in two excerpts of 2022 government work report.

The Chinese excerpt is taken from the first three paragraphs of the second part of 2022 Chinese government work report: Overall Requirements and Policy Orientation for Economic and Social Development in 2022, and the English excerpt is comprised of three corresponding paragraphs. The article would compare and analyze the transitivity, modality and thematic features of two excerpts respectively before making an overall appraisal of the English translation in terms of its stylistic effects.

### **5. Functional Stylistic Analysis of Two Excerpts**

#### **5.1. An Comparison of Transitivity System in Two Excerpts**

Transitivity system is a property of clauses that encode realities via lexicogrammar and thus an important grammatical resource to materialize the ideational function of language. It "construes the world of experience into manageable set of process types." [18] In An Introduction To Functional Grammar Halliday put it that transitivity system is composed of six processes that represent human experience in terms of: physical and physiological actions (Material and Behavioral), thinking and speaking actions (Mental and Verbal) and actions that signal the existence of something or someone and their identifying features (Existential and Relational).

**Table.1:** A Summary of Process Types in Two Excerpts (F stands for frequency and P for percentage.)

	Chinese excerpt(F/P)	English excerpt(F/P)
Material process	56/62.22%	30/55.56%
Mental process	5/5.56%	4/7.41%
Verbal process	2/2.22%	2/3.7%
Relational process	26/28.89%	17/31.48%
Behavioral process	0/0.00%	0/0.00%
Existential process	1/1.85%	1/1.85%

From the table above, both excerpts are found to be predominated by material processes, the process of doings and happenings. It is quite normal to see such a result from these two excerpts as they are taken from the overall requirement and policy orientation part of a government work report. The government must take a bundle of actions and demands for improvements in various aspects. Another interesting stylistic feature shared by this excerpts is that actors tended to be omitted, with 50 actors out of 54 being left out in the Chinese text and 20 out of 25 in its English translation. Stylistically, such a pattern of arrangements gives prominence to goals preceded by concrete verbs like implement, pursue and apply. Meanwhile since the actor is self-evident in such a register, it is fair to omit it if such practice do not lead to confusion or mistakes. Therefore in both excerpts readers could better concentrate on measures the Chinese government will take in 2022 and they would be well impressed by the pragmatic and action-oriented image portrayed through such a style.

The second comes the relational process which is essentially a process of being and the relationship between two things or concepts. In such a process the carrier is either identified with something or attributed with other value. Take "This year is of great significance in the cause of the Party and the country." for example. Such an arrangement gives readers further information about the year of 2022. The high frequency of relational process might be linked to the complex nature of economic and political issues.

In both excerpts transitivity system are rather seldom used to represent mental, behavioral, verbal processes as both the mental and verbal processes have an undertone of subjectivity.

## 5.2. An Comparison of Modality in Two Excerpts

Modality, a key exponent of the interpersonal metafunction, refers to a speaker's attitudes, or opinion about the truth value of a proposition[routledge handbook of stylistics P48]. It is therefore about some animate being's subjective judgement on other entities. Modality can be categorized in four primary ways to account for the level of obligation or duty in a statement (denotic modality), its truth value (epistemic modality), level of desire (boulomaic modality), and the degree of perception (perception modality)[5].

The first table will be about the modality features in the original Chinese government report excerpt, and the second about the modality system in the English excerpt both analyzed in terms of previously mentioned four ways.

**Table.2:** A Summary of Modal Categories in Chinese Excerpt

denotic modality(F/P=20/69.0 %)	boulomaic modality(F/P=2/6.9 %)	epistemic modality(F/P=3/10.3 %)	perception modality(F/P=4/13.8 %)
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**Table.3:** A Summary of Modal Categories in English Excerpt

denotic modality(F/P=20/76.9 %)	boulomaic modality(F/P=1/3.9 %)	epistemic modality(F/P=2/7.7 %)	perception modality(F/P=3/11.5 %)
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It is clear that the two tables of distribution of modality choices are almost symmetrical. The dominant modal category in two excerpts is the denotic modality, which is the expression of duty. The concentration of obligations in two passages could be explained in terms of the function of these two texts. The government work report is meant to be a review and plan that will be scrutinized by the legislative body to see if the government will take on responsibilities or not. Therefore the government shall list their obligations in detail.

The clauses that states what the government will do are heavily modalised by “we must” and imperative sentences, among other grammatical structures. The boulomaic modality are found in expressions of desire, and while both excerpts make use modality to deliver government promises, the Chinese source text also highlighted the importance of the upcoming 20th National Party Congress. In both the Chinese and English excerpts, the epistemic and perception modality which account for beliefs and perception, are about China’s economy, sending a strong voice that China is confident in its growth in 2022.

**5.3. An Comparison of Theme System in Two Excerpts**

Theme and rheme is a pair of terms first developed by a Prague linguist Mathesius, with the theme referring to given information and rheme new information. Our cognition follows the direction of understanding the world from something we are familiar with to something rather strange. The progression from theme to rheme is an important feature of discourses and texts. Therefore the thematic progression or theme-rheme pattern is an important grammatical resource to attain cohesion and coherence. Halliday made the distinction between marked theme and unmarked theme by looking at the functions of themes. If one theme takes the role of subject in a declarative sentence, it is unmarked and otherwise it would be marked[19].

**Table.4:** A Summary of Theme System in Two Excerpts

	Chinese excerpt	English excerpt
Unmarked theme (F/P)	5/62.5%	14/87.5%
Marked theme (F/P)	3/37.5%	2/12.5%
Sentence number	6	11

The usage of marked theme will make audience understand the semantic information better for their theme and subject are identical. And those unmarked themes are for certain purposes like structure flexibility or emphasis[20]. The high frequency and percentage of unmarked theme ensures a smooth reading. Their repeated occurrence contributed to make clauses

closely linked together and therefore lend more ease for readers to digest sets after sets of principles and policies.

The marked themes are rare, with the Chinese version outnumbering the English counterpart for just 1 marked theme which constitutes a clause to introduce a new information testified by scientific research. The other two marked themes in two clauses correspond with each other: "For the government to deliver, we must, under the strong leadership of the Party Central Committee with Comrade Xi Jinping at its core, do the following" and "The harder things get, the more confident we must be". In both cases, government are described to be a warrior faced with formidable enemies, but he or she nevertheless takes the initiative to overcome them.

There is a point worth mentioning: although the thematic distribution in terms of marked and unmarked in two excerpts are quite identical, the number of unmarked themes is almost three times the number of the Chinese version, but it does not necessarily mean that we would have a harder time consuming the Chinese original text for the two language are genetically different. "The English and Chinese languages are different at text level, among many other levels. Thus translators are obliged to make adjustment to the thematic patterns by observing the linguistic norms of the target language[21]." The English language is a hypotactic language natively spoken in low-context cultures whereas the Chinese language is paratactic devised to serve a high-context culture.

## 6. Conclusion

English versions of Chinese government work reports are crucial in constructing a China and Chinese society in English readers' minds. Even small nuances could bring much trouble on the global arena. The basic information of the original texts are probably the foremost and the easiest part to be rendered. What is troubling advanced translators is to convey the stylistic effects covertly conveyed over through a series of grammatical structures. Therefore a stylistic analysis of the 2022 English translation by comparing it to the Chinese original text, is justified. This article employs three important grammatical features of language, namely transitivity, modality and thematic progression to examine their distribution and contribution to stylistic effects. Based on previous discussion, the article would conclude that the 2022 English and Chinese government work reports have produced basically the same stylistic effects and the English version could be termed the stylistic equivalent to its Chinese original text. Further researches on this topic could be done by taking the whole texts of both the source and target texts, make a diachronic study or make use of other systems based on the systemic-functional grammar, among other improvements. This article serves as an important reference for translators or translation polishers.

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