

# Research on the Translation of Xi Jinping's Speech on the 10th Anniversary of the Belt and Road Initiative from the Perspective of Skopos Theory

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## Abstract

Since the Belt and Road Initiative was put forward, it has continuously achieved fruitful results. China has increasingly close contacts with foreign countries. China is committed to increasing trade cooperation with other countries to benefit the people of all countries. So how to appropriately translate political, economic, and cultural languages with Chinese characteristics to tell Chinese stories well and spread the voice of China is becoming increasingly important in international communication. Based on the three principles of the Skopos theory, this paper analyzes some of the original and translated versions of Xi Jinping's speech on the tenth anniversary of the Belt and Road Initiative, aiming to explore the translation methods of documents with Chinese characteristics and enrich the research on document translation through the analysis of the content of the speech.

**Keywords:** The Belt and Road Initiative the Skopos Theory Exchange.

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## One Preface

In 2013, President Xi Jinping put forward the Belt and Road Initiative for the first time, and we held the "the Belt and Road" International Cooperation Summit Forum in 2017, 2019 and 2023 respectively. It has been more than ten years since this initiative was put forward. The Belt and Road construction has gradually transformed from concept to action, from vision to reality, and it has yielded fruitful results. The joint construction of the Belt and Road has enabled Maldives to have a cross sea bridge, Africa to have an electrified railway, and the Greek port of Piraeus to regain its vitality. Qiankai Port in Peru has become the first smart and green port in South America. The Ya'an Wanzhou high-speed railway has ushered Indonesia into the "era of high-speed railway", and the China-Laos railway has made Laos' "railway dream" come true. A large number of beneficial projects such as fungal grass technology, water purification equipment renovation, and solar power stations have greatly improved local living conditions. Although the public opinion ecology of countries along the Belt and Road is increasingly friendly, there are still differences in understanding of the Belt and Road Initiative. Different from other texts such as tourism, science and technology, literature, etc., President Xi's speech at the 10th anniversary summit of the Belt and Road belongs to the style of political commentary. The translation of such texts is an

extremely serious task with a distinctive political nature, and it is the main source for other countries to understand China's policies, political systems and political positions, which has a huge role in improving China's international image and international discourse influence. Translating the content of speeches accurately is of great significance for promoting cultural exchanges, business cooperation, and project implementation in order to better spread China's ideas and stance on foreign affairs. This requires translators to have good language skills, cultural awareness, and political cultivation to ensure accurate and effective completion of translation work. At the same time, translators are required to have a sense of serving the audience, while remaining loyal to the original ideas, adapting to the language, thinking, and cultural habits of foreign readers, and using expressions that are popular among foreign audiences to enhance the readability of the translation.

## A Review of the Skopos Theory

The earliest scholar in China to introduce the theory of purpose into the research field was Gui Qianyuan (1987), who believed that the role of translation is the foundation of all translation. Only by clarifying the purpose of translation, that is, the specific object and purpose of translating an original text, can the translator translate it well, have a high-quality translation, and make a correct evaluation of the

translation. Therefore, he believed that it is the function of the translation, not the function of the original text, that determines the evaluation of the function and meaning of the translation [1]. Afterwards, Zhang Nanfeng (1995) reintroduced Hans Vermeer's translation purpose theory in his research. There are different translation methods for different purposes. Therefore, it should be pointed out that the translation does not necessarily have to faithfully imitate the original text. Being faithful to the original text, regardless of its interpretation or definition, is only a possible and legitimate purpose. Claiming that the teleology of translation has three contributions, it explicitly proposes a concept that is often denied, which increases the potential effectiveness of translation and available translation strategies. It liberates translators from the meaningless practice of literal translation imposed by others and increases their responsibility, as their translations must be able to achieve the intended purpose. It is also pointed out that it is difficult to determine which method is better when translating an article, but if the purpose of translation is known, there can be a conclusion, at least in terms of macro strategies. That is to say, regardless of black or white cats, catching mice is a good cat [2]. In 1999, Zhong Weihe and Zhong Yu (1999) systematically introduced the German functionalist translation theory. When it comes to functionalism, three outstanding contributors to functionalist translation theory must be mentioned: Katharina Reiss, Hans Vermeer, and Justa Holz Manttari. Reiss first listed textual function as a criterion for translation criticism in her book "Possibilities and Limitation of Translation Criticism" in 1971, which evaluates translations based on the relationship between the functions of the original text and the translated text. At that time, Reiss's theory was based on the theory of equivalence. Therefore, this relationship actually refers to the functional equivalence between the original text and the translated text. Reiss' student Weimar broke through the limitations of equivalence theory and developed the main functionalist theory, Skopos theory, based on the first criterion of the translation process, which is the purpose of the text (skopos). The skopos theory proposed by Vermeer is the most important theory in functionalist translation theory. Skopos is a Greek word meaning 'purpose'. According to the skopos theory, the primary rule followed by all translations is the "Law of Purpose": the purpose to be achieved by the translation behavior determines the entire process of the translation behavior, that is, the result determines the method. There are three explanations for this purpose: the translator's purpose (such as making money); The communicative purpose of the translation (such as enlightening readers); and the purpose to be achieved by using a special translation technique (such as using a literal translation method based on the grammatical structure of a language to illustrate its unique features). Usually, 'purpose' refers to the communicative purpose of the translation. So where does the purpose come from? Skopos theory holds that the initiator of the translation

process determines the communicative purpose of the translation. The initiator needs a translation for some special reason. In an ideal situation, he would provide the reasons for the need for the translation, the recipient of the translation, the environment in which the translation will be used, the functions that the translation should have, and details related to the reasons. All of these constitute the translation brief. Translation requires the translator to indicate what type of translation is needed, and the translator is not passively accepting everything. He can participate in determining the purpose of the translation, especially when the initiator is not clear about the translation purpose due to insufficient professional knowledge or other reasons. The translator can negotiate with the initiator to derive the translation purpose from special translation situations. In addition to the purposive rule, teleology has two other rules: the coherence rule and the fidelity rule. The coherence rule refers to the requirement that the translation must meet the standard of intralingual coherence. The so-called intralingual coherence refers to the requirement that the translation must be understandable to the recipient and meaningful in the target language culture and the communicative environment in which the translation is used. The fidelity rule states that there should be intertextual coherence between the original text and the translated text. Interlinguistic coherence is similar to what is commonly referred to as fidelity to the original text, and the degree and form of fidelity are determined by the purpose of the translation and the translator's understanding of the original text. And Mantali Biweimir further expanded the scope of application of functionalist translation theory. Her theory is based on behavioral theory. Focusing on the behavior of the translation process, the roles of participants, and the environment in which the translation process occurs for all forms of cross-cultural conversion, including text conversion [3]. Li Changshuan from Beijing Foreign Studies University also introduced the skopos theory in his book *Non-literary Translation Theory and Practice*. Skopos theory is the most important theory in functionalist translation theory, founded in the 1980s by two famous German translation theorists, Hans J. Vermeer and Katharine Reiss. At that time, the equivalence theory and linguistic school were prevalent. Skopos theory boldly breaks free from the constraints of equivalence theory, takes purpose as the general principle, and examines translation within the framework of behavioral theory and cross-cultural communication, opening up a new path for the world translation theory community, including the Chinese translation academic community. Skopos theory introduces "behavioral theory" into translation theory, believing that translation is an act, a cross-cultural communicative act. Every action has its own purpose, and the purpose that translation aims to achieve determines the methods and strategies that translation should adopt. This is the primary principle of teleology - the principle of purpose. The principle of purpose holds that the purpose of a specific translation task determines whether the translation of a text requires literal

translation, free translation, or a balance between the two, thus resolving the long-standing debate about whether literal translation or free translation should be used. The translation purpose also determines the specific translation strategy. For example, a friend asked me to translate several foreign addresses, and I asked him what it was for. He said he wrote a letter to a foreign country, but I told him that there was no need for translation, as translating would not be able to send it to the foreign country. The translation strategy at this point is not to translate. Is the reference list translated? If the book does not have a foreign or Chinese translation, it is better not to translate it, because if it is translated, readers will not be able to find the book in bookstores. When translating scripts for movies, it is necessary to consider the number of syllables and whether the pronunciation of words is consistent with the original pronunciation. To compile general novels into children's books, the language should be suitable for the characteristics of children. The other two principles of teleology are the coherence principle, which includes intratextual coherence and intertextual coherence. Intra-discourse coherence, also known as the coherence rule. It refers to the requirement that the translation must be logical, in line with the expression habits of the target language, understandable to the target language readers, and meaningful in the target language culture and the communicative environment in which the translation is used. My understanding is that the translation should be self explanatory. Inter discourse coherence is also known as the fidelity rule. In skopos theory, the principle of fidelity refers to the fact that the translation does not contradict the original text, there is a certain connection between the translation and the original text, and it is not required that the translation and the original text be word for word in content. The degree and form of fidelity required by teleology are determined by the purpose of the translation and the translator's understanding of the original text. Among the three principles mentioned above, inter discourse coherence is subordinate to intra discourse coherence, and both are guided by the principle of purpose. That is to say, when the principle of purpose requires coherence between or within discourse, both will lose their effectiveness. Skopos theory holds that translation is a comparison between two cultures. Translation inevitably involves culture and cultural peculiarities. Vermeer believed that culture is a set of social rules and habits that individuals, as members of society, must understand in order to be similar or different from others. The particularity of culture refers to the phenomenon that exists in one culture but not in the other when comparing two cultures [4].

## **The embodiment of the three principles of Skopos Theory in the tenth anniversary speech:**

### **1. The Skopos Rule**

Some vocabulary with Chinese characteristics appears in the speech, some of which are expressed in simplified Chinese. In his 10th anniversary speech, President Xi Jinping often cited various sources to help

readers better understand the meaning. Therefore, when translating, free translation should be adopted. Here are examples to illustrate this.

#### **(1) Original text:**

This initiative is to draw on the ancient Silk Road, take connectivity as the main line, strengthen policy communication, facility connectivity, trade facilitation, financial integration, and people to people connectivity with other countries, inject new momentum into world economic growth, open up new space for global development, and create a new platform for international economic cooperation.

Translation: The BRI, drawing inspiration from the ancient Silk Road and focusing on enhancing connectivity, aims to enhance policy, infrastructure, trade, financial and people-to-people connectivity, inject new impetus into the global economy, create new opportunities for global development, and build a new platform for international economic cooperation.

The "Five Links" refer to policy communication, facility connectivity, smooth trade, financial integration, and people to people connectivity. But considering the cultural differences between China and the West, as well as the differences in language expression. According to the principle of purpose, when translating the "Five Links", semantic transformation should be carried out in the original text to enable readers to understand the translation. Therefore, a free translation method is adopted to translate the "Five Links" as "policy, accelerator, trade, financial, and people to people connectivity". In the translation, the word "connectivity" is used instead of "communication, connectivity, smoothness, integration, and communication" in the original text. This approach will increase the readability of the translation, avoid difficulties in understanding, and better convey China's position on foreign development.

#### **(2) Original text:**

"The the Belt and Road" cooperation has moved from "freehand brushwork" to "fine brushwork", turning the planning map into a real picture, and a large number of landmark projects and "small and beautiful" projects benefiting people's livelihood have taken root.

Translation: Belt and Road cooperation has progressed from "sketching the outline" to "filling in the details", and blueprints have been turned into real projects.

In the original text, "sketching the outline" and "filling in the details" are both artistic creation terms and are a technique of expression in Chinese painting. In this paper, "freehand brushwork" means the development framework of the "the Belt and Road" initiative, while "meticulous painting" means that this initiative has entered the stage of concrete achievements. At the same

time, "small" in "small and beautiful" can refer to the small scale of a single project or the small contribution of the project to the national economic development, while "beauty" is the standard for high economic feasibility and social benefits of the project. According to the principle of purpose, in order to ensure that readers can understand the extended meanings of these words and enhance the readability of the translation, "freehand brushwork" and "meticulous painting" are translated as "sketching the outline" and "filling in the details", respectively. "small yet beautiful" is translated as 'small yet smart'.

### (3) Original text:

Jointly build the the Belt and Road, adhere to the principle of joint consultation, joint construction and sharing, cross the differences between different civilizations, cultures, social systems, and development stages, open up a new path for exchanges among countries, build a new framework for international cooperation, and gather the greatest common denominator of human common development.

Translation: It has opened up a new path for exchanges among countries, and established a new framework for international cooperation. Indeed, the BRI represents humanity's joint pursuit of development for all.

The term 'greatest common divisor' is a mathematical term that refers to the largest common divisor between two or more integers. The phrase in President Xi's speech means that "the the Belt and Road" is our common pursuit of human development. According to the principle of purpose, when translating a translation, it is necessary to consider using the method of free translation to express the extended meaning, translated as "... humanity's joint pursuit of development for all", rather than translating it as the mathematical term "Greatest Common Divisor" (GCD) in English.

### (4) Original text:

Through the joint construction of the "the Belt and Road", China's door to opening up is becoming larger and larger, the inland areas have changed from "fullbacks" to "forwards", and the opening up and development of coastal areas have reached a higher level.

Translation: Through Belt and Road cooperation, China is opening its door even wider to the world, with its inland regions turning from "fullbacks" into "forwards," and coastal regions scaling new heights in their opening-up.

The terms' defender 'and' forward 'in the original text both belong to sports terminology. A defender in ball games mainly refers to a player who defends, steals, and blocks the opponent's attack. A forward refers to a person who serves as an assist in football or basketball. The subject in the original text is "inland region", and the intended meaning of this

sentence is that the inland region is developing rapidly and gradually leading the way in development. According to the principle of purpose, in order to accurately convey the original meaning while avoiding ambiguity, literal translation is adopted, which is translated as "fullbacks" and "forwards" respectively.

## 2. The Coherence Rule

There are significant differences in language features and structures between English and Chinese. English expression emphasizes the choice of tense, while Chinese ignores tense issues. Meanwhile, English emphasizes form and meaning, while Chinese emphasizes meaning and form. To avoid reading difficulties caused by such differences, when translating, it is necessary to follow the principle of coherence and arrange the translated text through tense transitions and sentence adjustments.

### (1) The original text:

This initiative is to draw on the ancient Silk Road, with connectivity as the main line, to strengthen policy communication, facility connectivity, trade facilitation, financial integration, and people to people connectivity with other countries.

Translation: The BRI, drawing inspiration from the ancient Silk Road and focusing on enhancing connectivity, aims to enhance policy, infrastructure, trade, financial and people-to-people connectivity.

The translation uses "The BRI" as the subject and "aims to..." as the predicate, with only one main structure. Take "drawing inspiration from the ancient Silk Road and focusing on enhancing connectivity" as a parenthesis. The original intention of the the Belt and Road Initiative is to use the ancient Silk Road for reference, and to explain it with connectivity as the main line, so as to ensure the integrity of the sentence structure as a whole.

### (2) Original text:

Jointly discuss, jointly build and share, open, green, honest, high standard, benefit people's livelihood, and become an important guiding principle for high-quality joint construction of the Belt and Road.

Translation: Important guiding principles for high-quality Belt and Road cooperation have been laid down, which include the principle of "planning together, building together, and benefiting together," the philosophy of open, green and clean cooperation, and the goal of pursuing high-standard, people-centered and sustainable cooperation.

From the perspective of tense, according to Chinese thinking, the Belt and Road Initiative has been put forward since 2013, and the established guiding principles should also use the general past tense. But for target language readers, using the present perfect tense



would be more appropriate and emphasize that this principle has been in use since its establishment until now. At the same time, in order to avoid the situation of being top heavy and bottom light, English will express the subject first, so the guiding principle will be used as the subject in translation, and the other four small principles will be expressed in the structure of subordinate clauses.

### (3) The original text:

For the past 10 years, we have been committed to building an economic corridor as the guide, a large corridor and information highway as the backbone, and railways, highways, airports, ports, and pipelines as the support.

Translation: Over these 10 years, we have endeavored to build a global network of connectivity consisting of economic corridors, international transportation routes and information highway as well as railways, roads, airports, ports, pipelines and power grids.

Due to the difference in emphasis between English and Chinese in terms of form and meaning, in order to ensure sentence coherence, it is necessary to use some linking words. At the same time, in order to avoid the situation of being top heavy and bottom light, the subject is often placed at the beginning. Translate the word "skeleton" first, and then use the phrase "consider of" to introduce the specific content included. At the same time, use "as well as" to express the parallel relationship with the previous text, ensuring the coherence of the sentence while maintaining a regular structure.

### (4) The original text:

I once said that the reason why the ancient Silk Road became famous in history was not because of war horses and spears, but because of camel caravans and goodwill; It's not about strong ships and sharp guns, but treasure ships and friendship.

Translation: I once said that the pioneers of the ancient silk routes won their place in history not as conquerors with warships, guns, horses or swords. Rather, they are remembered as friendly emissaries leading camel caravans and sailing ships loaded with goods.

There is a difference between English and Chinese languages, where English emphasizes form and Chinese emphasizes meaning. There are two parallel structures in the original text, not warhorses and spears, but camels and goodwill; It's not about strong ships and sharp guns, but treasure ships and friendship. According to the principle of coherence, the translation will combine the negative meanings of "not war horses and spears, not strong ships and sharp cannons". Using the transitional word 'rat' to connect sentences, translate it as

"relying on camel caravan and goodwill, treasure ship and friendship". Ensure the coherence of the entire discourse, in line with English expression habits and thinking.

### (5) The original text:

China is comprehensively promoting the great cause of building a strong country and national rejuvenation with Chinese path to modernization. What we are pursuing is not China's independent modernization, but looking forward to working together with other developing countries to achieve modernization.

Translation: China is endeavoring to build itself into a stronger country and rejuvenate the Chinese nation on all fronts by pursuing Chinese modernization. The modernization we are pursuing is not for China alone, but for all developing countries through our joint efforts.

There are many master-slave relationships in English sentences, reflecting different levels. In Chinese sentences, there are mostly parallel relationships, and it is never clear which one is dominant. Generally speaking, English has long sentences and clauses, while Chinese has short sentences and clauses. The difference between English and Chinese languages requires us to often use subordinate clauses, participle phrases, prepositional phrases, and conjunctions to convert Chinese parallel structures into subordinate structures when processing Chinese sentences into English, in order to highlight the key points of the sentence, clarify the primary and secondary, and conform to English writing habits. The translation of "Chinese path to modernization" in the original text uses the prepositional phrase structure "by pursuing Chinese modernization". At the same time, the second sentence uses the post attribute "we are pursuing" and the prepositional phrase "through our joint efforts" to ensure sentence coherence.

## 3. The Fidelity Rule

Guided by the principle of fidelity in functionalism, if the original meaning cannot be fully expressed during the translation process, additional or omitted translations can be used to supplement and improve, in order to facilitate the target readers' understanding of the connotation and meaning of the original vocabulary. Due to the different language structures between Chinese and English in terms of word expression, Chinese places more emphasis on semantic coherence, while English emphasizes semantic coherence. For the convenience of readers' understanding, translation techniques such as adding or omitting translations can be adopted without affecting the overall meaning of the sentence.

### (1) The original text:

Trains running on railways, cars galloping on highways, air flights connecting countries, cargo ships cutting waves, and fast and convenient digital e-

commerce have become the camel bells and sails of international trade in the new era.

Translation: Trains speeding along rail tracks, automobiles running on roads, flights connecting different countries, cargo ships breaking waves, and e-commerce bringing so much convenience to people—they have all become symbols of international trade in the new era, just like camel caravans and the sailing ships were for the past age.

The translation used an additional translation when dealing with the phrase “becoming camel bells and sail shadows of international trade in the new era”. It is obvious that camel bells and sail shadows are both representative words of the ancient Silk Road, but they correspond to the “new era”, and it may not be possible to achieve a perfect match in sentence meaning. Adding a sentence “just like camel caravans and the sailing ships were for the past age.” in translation makes the translation closer to the original meaning and follows the principle of fidelity in functionalism.

### (2) The original text:

As long as countries have the desire for cooperation and coordinated actions, natural barriers can become smooth paths, “landlocked countries” can become “land linked countries”, and development valleys can become prosperous highlands.

Translation: When countries embrace cooperation and act in concert, a deep chasm can be turned into a thoroughfare, land-locked countries can become land-linked, and a place of underdevelopment can be transformed into a land of prosperity.

The fidelity principle of the skopos theory emphasizes that the original text and translation should be closely aligned. In the original text, “Tianqian” means “a naturally formed large ditch that separates transportation”, “Tongtu” means “a smooth road”, “Land-locked countries” refer to “countries that do not have an outlet to the sea and must rely on land routes to trade and communicate with other countries”, and “Land linked countries” refer to “countries that can transform from” land locked “countries to countries that can efficiently connect and trade with other countries through land routes by building infrastructure and strengthening connectivity with other countries. A ‘depression’ refers to a terrain that is approximately enclosed and lower than the surrounding ground, while a ‘highland’ refers to a place with higher terrain. To ensure that the translation is similar in meaning to the original text, the translation will use literal translation for “Tianqian”, “Lu Suo Guo”, and “Lu Lian Guo”. The meaning of a low-lying area with simultaneous development is a place with a lower level of development. The English word for low-lying area is marsh. The translation does not directly translate it, but rather treats it as

“undeveloped” to express its extended meaning more appropriately.

### (3) The original text:

To jointly build the Belt and Road, we should pay attention to the fact that all people can gather firewood and help each other go far. What we advocate is that we can live well and let others live well. What we practice is connectivity, mutual benefit and reciprocity, and what we seek is common development, cooperation and win-win results.

Translation: Belt and Road cooperation is based on the belief that flame runs high when everyone adds wood to the fire and that mutual support can get us far. Such cooperation seeks to deliver a good life not only to people of just one country, but to people in other countries as well. It promotes connectivity, mutual benefit, common development, cooperation and win-win outcomes.

The fidelity principle of the skopos theory does not require translating the original text word for word, but rather ensuring that the translation does not contradict the original text, and that there is a certain connection between the translation and the original text, which can also be said to be coherence between discourse. There are four adjectives in the original text, “valued, admired, practiced, and sought after,” but the translation did not deliberately translate these three meanings word for word. Instead, three verbs and phrases, “be based on, seek to, promote,” were used throughout the discourse to convey the original meaning and remain faithful to the original text. The translation of “when everyone adds wood to the fire” also follows the principle of literal translation, meaning ‘flame runs high when everyone adds wood to the fire’, which is faithful to the original text in terms of clause meaning.

## CONCLUSION

The research on the translation of the 10th anniversary speech from the perspective of teleology provides certain assistance for the translation of political discourse literature. Translators should focus on foreign readers and help them understand Chinese policies. At the same time, translators should understand the characteristics of political vocabulary, accurately grasp the connotation of the original text based on a full understanding, and be faithful to the original text. Finally, translators should flexibly use various translation methods during the translation process, striving to conform to the expression habits of the original text.

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