



The Re-contextualization of the Translation of the “Yào” Sentence in the Chinese Government Work Report

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Abstract. The study features a self-built bilingual parallel corpus, which consists of a collection of work reports from 2012 to 2022 by the Chinese government. We investigated functions of the “yào” sentence and the translation of the modal word “yào”. The translators recontextualized the sentences containing the character “yào”, and comprehensively considered the constraining factors such as the linguistic characteristics, cultural context, and cultural differences between Chinese and English in the government work report. The study revealed the following: for expressing the specific function of giving instructions to various interlocutors, the translator considered the type of interlocutors and the speech act types, to recontextualize the particular word “yào” and other components of the “yào” sentence in the translation. Besides, the translation of “yào” is closely related to the interpersonal meta-function in systemic functional linguistics. The translator adopts “Element Replacement” as the chief translating strategy, by using words or phrases with medium or high modal values, such as “must”, “should”, “will”, “need to”, “have to”, etc., to translate “yào”, excluding words with low modal values in the translation. The addition, deletion, and reorganization of elements involve the explicit or implicit addressees and the shift of active and passive voice in the translation.

Keywords: Government Work Report, Contextualization, Modal Words, “Yào” Sentence.

1 Introduction

Political discourse refers to speeches delivered by heads of governments or officials for clarifying the official positions, opinions, and policies on public occasions. The history of political speeches traced back to public talks by politicians in ancient Greece. Political discourse (Woodhams, 2019) [11] requires attention to not only the speaker but also the political and communicative events themselves. Researchers need to heed the interaction between context and text. As an important type of political discourse, the quality of government work reports is pivotal for shaping the national image. The work report of the Chinese government features the work done by the government in the past

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year and the outlook for future work. In addition to reviewing the significant progress made in social life, the government will introduce work plans, and policies, and give guidance in specific areas such as culture, agriculture, economy, and diplomacy on the horizon. The linguistic expressions of core concepts and typical structures constitute an indispensable part of the government's international publicity undertaking. The government work reports contain a number of translations of the modal word "yào", which is used in work reports, which not only reflect the formal characteristics of official documents but also typically reflect the government's position, attitude, and measures. In political literature, the word "yào" is used to express modal meaning, which has a unique role and function, highlighting the role of the central government in guiding and supervising.

2 Literature Review

Political discourse and translation research focus on the following aspects: ideology and political texts (Beck 2021)[2], political language and rhetoric (Eden et al. 2019; Cap, 2021)[6][5], and related theories (Block 2019)[4], approaches (Esposito 2021)[7] and practices. In China, political translation mainly focuses on the following aspects: the translation of political terms with Chinese characteristics (Wang Baorong, Chen Yuzhe, Jiang Haiyan, 2023; Wang E'nuo & Pan Zhidan, 2023; Yang Hongyan, Wang Xunian, 2020) [25] [26] [27], Yu Xin (2022) [29] explored possible translating approaches toward political discourse into Russian; the dissemination of cultural translation to foreign countries (Hu Weihua, Guo Jirong, 2018; Fu Bin, Lan Hongjun, 2019; Feng Zhiqiang, 2022) [20][19][18].

At present, there are only a limited number of researches on "yào" in political discourse. Tian Xujun (2022)[24] explored into the operational norms of the English translation of modal verbs. Zhu Yihua and Feng Xiaochen (2023)[31] explored the English translation of "yào" from the perspective of Imagology theory. As far as researches on modality are concerned, researchers (Biber et al 2021; Lyons 1977; Halliday et al., 2004; Palmer 1990; Perkins 1982)[3][12][9][13][14] focused on the semantic dimensions of modal words, modal verbs, and auxiliary verbs. In traditional grammar, modal verbs (Zhang Daozhen, 1995; Biber et al., 2021) [30][3] refer to auxiliary words that express the speaker's tone, attitude, and stance in terms of ability, obligation, and guessing meaning. According to their frequency in use, modal verbs divide into core and peripheral modal verbs. Palmer (1977, 1990) [13] conducted a systematic study on modal verbs in English, dividing them into three categories: moral modality, dynamic modality, and epistemic modality. Moral modality is related to interpersonal relationships, legal and moral obligations, etc; Dynamic modality is related to subjective preferences, plans, and willpower; And cognitive modality is related to individual's cognitive and logical reasoning abilities.

In Systemic Functional Linguistics (Halliday et al., 2004; Yang Shu, Chang Chen-guang, 2021; Chang Chenguang, Li Meizi, 2023)[9][17][28], modality is discussed in various parts of Interpersonal meta-function, including modality, ideation, and grammatical metaphor. Modal verbs are often treated as a means of conveying

interpersonal meanings, which can express speakers’ subjective evaluation and stance on propositions or events. Based on degrees of intensity, modal verbs can be classified into three categories: high, middle, and low. The high-value modality words includes “must”, the median modality includes “shall”, “should”, “would”, “will”, etc., while the low-value words of modality includes “may”, “right”, “can”, “could”, etc. Researches on “yào” as a modal word (Lv Shuxiang, 1980) [21] involve semantic analysis and translation applications. Lv Shuxiang (1980)[21] provided a detailed explanation of the semantic and grammatical functions of “yào” in *Eight Hundred Words of Modern Chinese*. Tian Xujun (2022)[24] maintained that in Chinese government reports, the most frequently-used modal verbs are “要yào”, “会hui”, and “能néng”, indicating that the study of “yào” sentences has scientific research value.

In summary, researches on the “yào” sentence structure functions and translation in political discourse are far from sufficient. What’s more, the previous researches on “yào” were not systematic enough. An in-depth research is thus needed to bridge the gap between grammatical researches and application. In the study, we will look into the functions of the “yào” sentence in the political discourse, and find out translating strategies for the translation of the modal word “yào” in various contexts.

3 Theoretical Framework

Bernstein (1990) [1] (Madeleine et al., 2022)[16] proposed the concept of “recontextualization” in the education context, stating that recontextualization is an intermediate stage in coordinating knowledge production and reproduction. Van Leeuwen (1993) [15] believed that text needed to be transformed, including four ways of adaptation and transformation: element substitution, reorganization, addition, and deletion, which can achieve contextualized social practice significance. Fairclough (2003) [8] regarded recontextualization as the transfer of discourse between different texts. House (2006) [10] believes that “recontextualization” means considering the original framework and context, extracting textual elements, and placing them within the expectations of new relationships and cultural definitions. Miao Xingwei and Zhong Minjun (2023) [22]. Miao Xingwei & Li ke (2021) [23] Explored recontextualization from both theoretical and practical perspectives, provided specific models, and explained how to apply them. In this study, we consider the translator’s translating behavior as “recontextualization” endeavor, and attempt to provide a recontextual model for translating “yào” sentences. The translator makes corresponding processing of the original text based on cognition and understanding, and the translation process involves social practice and the transformation of meaning. On the one hand, as a discourse producer of government work reports, it is necessary to choose appropriate discourse in the Chinese context and produce expressions that are in line with national interests and government positions. On the other hand, translators need to exert subjective initiative, evaluate the position and value of the original author based on individual cognition, conduct text debugging and contextual reproduction, fully reflecting the strategies that the translator need to self-adjust during the translation process.

4 Research Design

This section includes data collection, analytical units and research procedures, research questions, discussions, and results.

4.1 Data Collection

In accordance with the research objectives, we selected the Chinese government work reports, which spanned from 2012 to 2022. For the sake of language accuracy and translation reliability, we chose the texts published on the official web site, <http://www.china.org.cn/chinese/>, a key national news website led by the State Council Information Office, and under the leadership of China Foreign Languages Publishing and Distribution Bureau. The selected corpus data consist of government reports of 11 years, which was built into a bilingual corpus with sentence alignment. Based on the government work reports, this corpus summarizes and lists various English translation methods of “yào” by providing reasons for different translation methods from the perspective of “Recontextualization Theory”.

Table 1. Basic information of government work reports and “yào” sentence over the 11 years

Year	Number of the Chinese Characters	Number of the English Words	Number of the Chinese Sentences	Number of the “Yào” Sentence	Percentage of the “Yào” Sentence (%)
2012	18265	13803	480	44	9.2
2013	15135	11193	304	39	12.8
2014	16847	13546	501	65	13
2015	17861	15724	506	73	14.4
2016	19820	17280	602	54	9
2017	18950	15867	554	93	16.8
2018	19558	17229	597	63	10.6
2019	19953	16144	613	85	13.9
2020	11096	8967	375	50	13.3
2021	17094	14185	500	35	7
2022	16678	13969	525	60	11.4
Total	191257	157907	5557	661	11.9%

According to Table 1, the basic information of the bilingual corpus can be seen. The table shows the number of sentences that contain “yào” in the work reports every year. For the 11-year period, the total word count of the Chinese government work report is 191, 257 words, and the English translation is 157,907 words. In the eleven years’ government work reports, there are a total of 661 “yào” sentences. Of all the sentences, the number of the “yào” sentence reached as high as 16.8% in the year 2017, and the average number of “yào” sentence in each year accounted for about 11.9%.

Table 2. Basic information of the corpus

Average Length of English and Chinese Texts	Chinese Texts	Translated Texts	Number of the “Yào” Sentence	Percentage of the “Yào” Sentence (%)
Mean	17387	14355	60	11.9
Median	17869	13803	60	10.6

Table 2 shows the mean and median word counts of government work reports and the “yào” sentence. The average length of the annual work report is 17,387 words, with a median of 17,869 words. The English translation is 14,355 words, with a median of 13,803 words. The average number of “yào” sentence is about 60, accounting for 11.9% in each year’s report. These statistics not only confirmed the previous findings about the use of modal word “yào” and the high frequency of occurrence of the “yào” sentence, but also showed that the “yào” sentence played a crucial role in shaping in Chinese political ideologies and government stances. Due to its high frequency of occurrence and peculiar function in government work reports, the “yào” sentence cannot be ignored in the discourse research. The large number of “yào” sentence has close relationship with discourse producers and Chinese national will. For the purpose of telling the international audiences the Chinese stories, the translator has to choose appropriate translating strategies for reproducing such ideology and stance in political translation. In this light, for researchers, it is worth making a systemic exploration into how the political ideas are produced and reproduced in texts of both languages.

4.2 Research Objects and Analytical Procedures

Firstly, we have to determine what the research object is. In the present study, the “yào” sentence should be the observation unit. “Yào” sentence here refers to a group words that express a coherent idea in the form of “we/the government/∅/governments at all levels, etc.+ plans/requires/ demands how to achieve such and such goals...” Since the verb in the “yào” sentence is a modal word expressing meanings including possibility, intention, or necessity, tokens only contain the character 要 “yào” are not suitable for the present study. At the same time, we recruit two raters, who are responsible for removing sentences that contain the token “yào”, which are at odds with the previous working definition. For instance, the examples, such as “as long as we firmly grasp the important strategic opportunity period of development...”, “seek impetus for promoting reform are not our research objects”. A sentence is marked by the use of a period, exclamation mark, or question mark. We use the approach of systemic functional linguistics to analyze all the “yào” sentences in the government reports.

Based on the research objectives, we provided the following research questions:

Question 1: How many types of translation are there for the core modal word “yào”?

Question 2: In adopting the recontextualization translating method, how are the reorganization, replacement, addition, and deletion of contextualized elements are applied for the “yào” sentence?

4.3 Analytical Framework

Systemic functional linguistics (Halliday et al. 2004) views language as a system of meaning potential, which includes three meta-functions, namely, Ideational, Interpersonal, and Textual relations. Interpersonal function is mainly concerned with interpersonal interaction and negotiation, with Modal system expressing the speaker's assessment or position on an event or proposition, which consists of mood, attitude, and stance. Halliday introduces the concept of Modality from the perspective of polarity, that is, the continuum between yes and no. Modalization and Modulization are two important concepts that are related to proposition and proposal, respectively. A proposition refers to a statement and a question of information, an offer is related to an item-service, an offer and an order. Modality includes usuality and probability, Modulization expresses different degrees of obligations and tendencies, obligations include allowed to/supposed to/required to, and tendencies include willing to/anxious to/determined to. In terms of degree, there are three values: high, medium, and low. The modal system includes elements such as modal operators, modal adjuncts, and interpersonal grammatical metaphors. According to the needs of the research, this paper only focuses on the core modal words related to the word “yào”.

5 Analysis Framework

Systemic Functional Linguistics (Halliday et al. 2004) considers language as a potential system of meaning, which can be divided into three major meta functions. The interpersonal function mainly involves interaction and negotiation between individuals, and the modal system expresses the speaker's evaluation or stance on an event or proposition, which is related to tone, attitude, and stance. Halliday introduces the concept of modality from a reductive perspective, which is a transitional level between yes and no. Modality and idealization are two important concepts related to propositions and proposals, respectively. Proposition refers to the statement and questioning of information; Proposal is related to goods and services, expressing provision and command. Modality includes regularity and probability; Intentionalization expresses different degrees of obligations and tendencies, including levels of allowance to/provision to/required to; Tendency includes levels of willingness to, urgency to, and determined to. In terms of modal assignment, it has three values: high, medium, and low. The modal system includes elements such as modal operators, modal adjuncts, and interpersonal grammatical metaphors. According to research needs, this article only focuses on the core modal words related to “yào” sentences.

6 Discussions and Results

First, the choice of specific modal words hinges on the context of the “yào” sentence. In terms of speech act types, the “yào” sentence mainly relates to “goods-service”, involving modulation in the interpersonal meta-function system. The speech act type is “Proposal” rather than “Proposition”. The government's expression of “Proposal” falls

into two subcategories, which can indicate various degrees of “Obligation” and “Inclination”. The translators choose the modalized modal operators such as “must”, “should”, “will”, and “need”, etc. to express such meanings. The above modal words are all subjectively implicit words, in which “must” and “need” can express the modal meanings of high value, while “should” and “will” can express the modal meaning of median value.

Secondly, in international communication, the cultural characteristics of the source context of the government work report need to be adjusted by means of translation. Thus, certain elements need to be reprocessed and rearranged according to the target linguistic context, for the purpose of adapting to the language and cultural habits of the audience in target language. Through re-contextualization, the political intention of the Chinese government can be conveyed smoothly and accurately in the translated language. “要” is a polysemy Chinese character, which has the following meanings, namely, “ying dang应当” (should), “bi xu必须” (must), “xu yào需要” (need), etc. The translators have to determine the exact meaning one by one according to context. We found that in the report, the Chinese government often needs to express strong determination, introduce new plans and deploy specific tasks. The English translation needs to be provided, evaluated and adjusted in combination with the linguistic and the social context as a whole. A glimpse into the corpus of the translated text can show that the translators prefer to use words such as “must”, “should”, “will”, “need”, “have to”, etc. in translation. What’s more, these modal words are with medium and high modal value in translation. As far as translating strategy is concerned, the translators resort to the strategy of “element substitution”. The four modal words themselves not only carry different meanings, but also they have different expressive effects in different contexts.

We found in Table 3 that the translated word “will” has the highest proportion, which accounted for 43% of all the “yào” word translations. “Will” mainly expresses the meaning of “Intention”, while the other translated modal words mainly express the meaning of “Obligation”. It is found that, “must” accounts for 24%; “should” accounts for 18%, a bit less than “must”; “need to” accounts for 13%, and other translations accounts for 2%. We believe that the modal meaning expressed in the English translation is in fact a faithful interpretation and interpretation of the positions and attitudes of the discourse producers. Different from the legislative discourse (Jiang Ting, Yang Bingjun, 2013), the English translation of Chinese law needs to show the modal assignment and adopts a strong modal language that represents the will of the nation and the strong power, while the government work report expresses the government’s determination, deployment and arrangement. In this light, the degree of enforceability and non-negotiability are not the same, so the high and middle value modal language is more often used.

Table 3. The Translated Word for “yào”

Modal meaning(modulization) of “yào”	count	percentage	Meaning of “Obligation”	Meaning of “Willingness”
will	269	43%	—	+
must	150	24%	+	—

should	115	18%	+	—
need	83	13%	+	—
Other modal expressions	13	2%		

Sometimes, the subjects of the “yào” sentence do not appear in the original Chinese text. For example, “难度再大, 今年也要再减少农村贫困人口 1000 万人以上。” (Regardless of how difficult it may be, this year, **we** must again reduce the poor rural population by more than 10 million.) In that way, the translators need to provide a subject according to the context, so as to further determine what modal words are appropriate. The authors have to figure out the subject for the above sentence. The government should be the agent for the choice of modal operators with high, medium and low values not only reflects the translators’ understanding of the government’s propositions and proposals, but also reflect the level of interpersonal relations and power positions.

a) Translated as “must”

The word “must” helps the speaker express extremely high objective requirements and promotes a change in subjective attitudes in the audiences.

(1) We Chinese today **must** shoulder the historic duty of advancing it.

(2) The government **must** first examine itself to identify the causes of these problems and work out ways to resolve them.

(3) We **must** make doing a good job in our work relating to agriculture, rural areas, and farmers the number one priority in all our endeavors and accelerate agricultural modernization in order to ensure China’s food security and increase farmers’ incomes.

(4) Their implementation by governments at all levels **must** be completely satisfactory. Ensuring people’s wellbeing is a top priority for the government, and we **must** do all we can to make sure that basic needs are met.

b) Translated as “need to”

“Yào” here is translated as “need to”, which expresses the meaning of “requiring to” and “demanding to have”.

(5) This year is the final year for completing the 12th Five-Year Plan. As we strive to accomplish the tasks and objectives for economic and social development set forth in this plan, we **need to** formulate the 13th Five-Year Plan, bringing to this work the spirit of reform and innovation and adopting a scientific approach.

In this example, the translator uses “need to” to express the meaning of the “Twelfth Five-Year Plan” economic and social development goals, which need to be completed in accordance with the requirements of the Party and the state.

(6) However, the government does not intend to perform an investment soliloquy; we **need to** do more to stimulate private investment and channel the investment of non-governmental capital into more areas.

It is the duty of the government “to do more to stimulate private investment and channel the investment of nongovernmental capital into more areas”. Only in this way can the government avoid “performing an investment soliloquy” and join hands with private investment forces to better regulate social capital.

(7) In addition to the 40 billion yuan government fund already in place for investment in China’s emerging industries, more funds **need to** be raised for promoting business development and innovation.

(8)Local governments also **need to** dig deep, take big steps to improve the mix of spending, and put various funds and assets to good use through multiple avenues.

In this sentence, “the local government” serves as the subject of the sentence. As the responsible entities, local governments at all levels not only need to fulfill their own functions, but also need to tap their potential more actively and steadily, so that they are likely to optimize the expenditure structure, and revitalize various assets and funds. “Need to” express the conditions that the government is expected to meet, rather than the obligations for the local government to fulfill. So, the translators prefer to use “need to” to “should”.

c) Translated as “should”

(9)All Chinese people should unite more closely and endeavor to accomplish the great cause of China’s reunification and the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation.

The word “should” expresses the meaning of obligation with high value.

(10)We realize that the situation is encouraging and so remain confident; but also that it is complex and so be mindful of adversity, have a keen sense of urgency, and industriously and earnestly do our work well.

(11)Megacities and large cities **should** be kept at an appropriate scale and fully play their role in driving the development of their surrounding areas.

d) Translated as “will”

(12)We **will** adhere to the thinking and practices that proved effective in last year’s government work and keep improving them.

(13)Ultimately, stable growth **will** ensure that urban and rural incomes increase and people’s lives improve.

(14)This year, we **will** help more than ten million rural residents lift themselves out of poverty, including over two million poor residents who are to be relocated from inhospitable areas, and continue to rebuild the dilapidated housing of poor rural house.

The word “will” expresses the strong intention to realize the goal set by the government. The Chinese government not only has the intention to bring along favorable changes for the people, but also has the confidence to ensure they will come into reality. In terms of people’s livelihood, the government’s intention is fully expressed by use of the modal verb “will”.

e) Other Translations

In addition to using modal verbs to express modal meanings, translators also use a small number of other expressions for showing the speaker’s attitudes and positions, which is also worth researchers’ attention. The translator resorts to this type of translating strategy simply because the context of the sentence has already contained or covered the meaning of “yào”.

(15)Although remarkable achievements have been made in China’s economic and social development, we still **have** quite a way **to** go and a lot of hard work to do before we can achieve modernization in all respects.

It can be seen that the phrase “have... to do” expresses the meaning that the ongoing activities will certainly be carried out in the future. The government will not relax their efforts in social and economic development, because there is a long way to go before the final success.

(16) We **are resolved to** ensure food security for our 1.4 billion people, and we know we can achieve this.

Here, “一定 yī ding” (definitely) and “yào” are translated as one phrase. The translator uses “are resolved to” to indicate the government is certain to resolve the food problem in a satisfactory manner. “Are resolved to” contain the modal meaning, exhibiting the government’s strong determination to make people’s food security the top priority.

(17) We **remain committed to** the major principles and policies on work related to Taiwan.

Third, the translator made the following adjustments in terms of adding, subtracting and reorganizing elements according to the context of the word “yào”.

The subject is closely related to the translation of the word “yào”. The subject of the word “yào” can be roughly divided into two categories: the explicit subject and the hidden subject. Based on observation, we can find that the subjects can be the following categories: “the government”, “we”, “all the Chinese people”, “the state-owned enterprises”, “governments at all levels”, and so on. Since a number of “yào” sentences do not have a subject, the translator has to apply the translating strategy of “Element Addition” for adding a suitable subject depending on the context of each subject-less “yào” sentence.

(18) In principle, we **will** lift pricing controls over all goods and services that can viably compete in markets.

The translation of this sentence also involves the addition of elements. The subject can be filled out as “our governments at all levels”, “pricing bureaus”, “our central government”, “relevant government departments”, or even “all of us”. The above entities are endowed with the power to lift pricing controls according to the law. It is undeniable that the addition of “we” as the subject is a manifestation of the addition of elements as a recontextualized translation strategy.

(19) Our efforts to build a new countryside **should** benefit the rural population.

The translation of this sentence involves the addition and reorganization of elements. “The initiative of developing the Chinese countryside”(新农村建设) cannot be the agent of an action, which will in the long run bring benefit the rural population. The translator adds the information “our efforts”, which are not present in the original text. By use of the translating strategies, the international audiences of the translated text can quickly and clearly grasp the meaning of the sentence.

(20) Local governments **should** act accordingly.

The translation of the above sentence involves the strategy of “Element Deletion”. The word “cai zheng”(finance) in “di fang cai zheng”(local finance) does not appear in the translation. Rather, “di fang cai zheng” is replaced in the translated version by a larger concept of “local government”. In this way, the unnecessary details are deleted in translation. Here, the translator takes into account the target language audience, freeing himself from further elaboration of unimportant details.

(21) To expand individual consumption, we **should** enhance people’s ability to consume, keep their consumption expectations stable, boost their desire to consume, improve the consumption environment and make economic growth more consumption-driven.

From Figure 1 below, we can find the translation of this sentence involves the “Addition of Elements” and the “Reorganization of Elements”. As the original text is heavy with Chinese mentality, the verb-object structure of “expanding individual consumption” is not suitable for the subject of the sentence, that is, the sentence cannot be understood as “expanding individual consumption should be done in the following aspects”. Instead, a new subject “we” has been added according to the context, serving as an agent of a series of actions, including “enhance people’s ability to consume”, “keep their consumption expectations stable”, “boost their desire to consume”, “improve the consumption environment”, and “make economic growth more consumption-driven”. The message of “expanding individual consumption” is reorganized according to the context, and thus becomes the target of a series of behaviors.

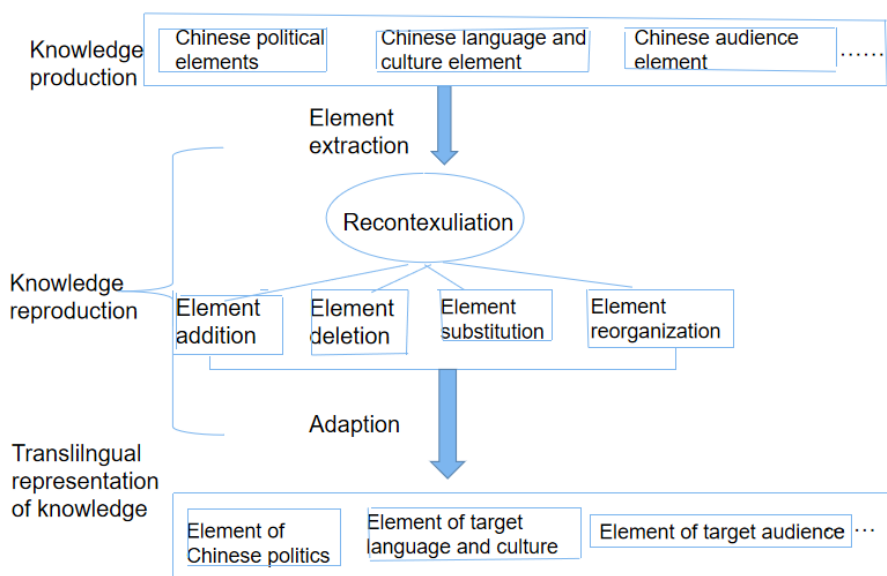


Fig. 1. Knowledge Reproduction by means of Re-contextualization Strategy

7 Conclusion

This study investigates the functions of “yào” sentence and the translation of “yào” in the government work reports. We find that the translators adopt a re-contextualization translating strategy for treating different elements in the “yào” sentence according to differences in two languages and cultures. The “element replacement” stands as the main translating strategy, in that the character “yào” is translated into different modal words according to the context. In order to faithfully reproduce the government’s stance and attitude, translators mainly use words or phrases with medium and high modal values for translation, including “must”, “should”, “will”, “need to”, “have to”, etc., and rarely use words with low modal values in translation. The translators translate “yào” into “will”, which has the highest proportion. This translation shows the gov-

ernment's spontaneous subjective will and responsive subjective will, respectively. "Must" can help' express both the government's obligations and the urgent desire for working for the benefit of the people. The modal word "should" expresses the government's feeling of a heavy responsibility on its shoulders. The translation of "need to" accounts for 13%. Other translations also express modal meaning, accounting for a much smaller proportion. In addition, the translator also adopted the strategies of "Element Addition" and "Element Deletion", and "Element Adjustment", corresponding to the addition and deletion of subjects, the reversal of the position of the subject and the adjustment of tenses, etc.

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