

# A Comparative Study of the English Translation of the Reports to the 19th and the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China from the Perspective of Corpus-based Critical Translation Studies

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**Abstract.** Using the English translations of reports to the 19th and 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China as corpora and the AntConc corpus research tool, this study employs a quantitative research method from a diachronic perspective to explore the similarities and differences in the language features of the two reports' English translations. It also investigates how the translations shape the image of the Communist Party of China by examining modality verbs and material process verbs. The results show that compared with the English translation of the 19th National Congress report, the vocabulary and sentence structure of the English translation of the 20th National Congress report are more varied and concise. The use of high-value modality verbs is significantly less in the English translation of the 20th National Congress report, successfully portraying the image of the Chinese Communist Party as close to the people. The translations of both reports highlight the diligent and pragmatic character of the Chinese Communist Party through the use of material process verbs.

## 1 Type-Token Ratio (TTR)

The larger the type/token ratio, the greater the variability of the vocabulary used in a specific text, and vice versa. As the type/token ratio is easily influenced by text length or corpus size, Scott proposed a new method to measure vocabulary variability, which is the standard type/token ratio ([1]). The standard type/token ratio refers to calculating the type/token ratio for each text based on 1,000 tokens, and then calculating the average of these ratios to obtain the standard type/token ratio ([2]).

**Table 1.** Type-Token Ratio (TTR)

	19th	20th
Type	3332	3882
Token	24989	25369
TTR	0.1333	0.1530

From the table above, it can be seen that both the type/token ratio and the standard type/token ratio of the translation of the report to the 20th National Congress are significantly higher than those of the 19th, indicating that the vocabularies used in the translation of the report to the 20th National Congress are more diverse and richer.

## 2 Lexical Density

There are two different views on lexical density. One view holds that lexical density is actually the type/token ratio. Yang Huizhong advocates that lexical density =

type/token ratio  $\times$  100%. Another view is proposed by Ure and Stubbs. They believe that lexical density = type/token ratio  $\times$  100%. Lexical density is mainly used to examine the variability and difficulty of vocabulary use in specific texts. Generally, the smaller the lexical density, the lower the information-carrying capacity of vocabulary and the simpler the vocabulary use. Using the Go Tagger Part-of-Speech tagging software, all the words in the translations of the reports to the 19th and 20th National Congress were tagged with Part-of-Speech code. As shown in the software, the total number of content words in the translation of the report to the 20th National Congress is slightly lower than that of the 19th, and the vocabulary density is also lower, indicating a relatively lower text difficulty level. The translation of the report to the 20th National Congress is more approachable to the English-speaking world. From the perspective of the Standard Type Token Ratio (STTR), although there is slightly more variation in vocabulary in the report to the 20th National Congress, the difficulty has not increased.

## 3 High-frequency words

High-frequency words are an important indicator of vocabulary distribution in the text, reflecting the most frequently used vocabulary in the text, and are an important way to highlight content and style features.

It is worth noting that in the report to the 20th National Congress, "We" at the beginning of a sentence ranks fifth

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among high-frequency words, with a frequency of up to 493. "We" in the middle of a sentence also appears 179 times. The total frequency of "We" and "we" is 672 times. In the 19th Party Congress report, "We" at the beginning of a sentence appears 452 times, while "we" in the middle of a sentence appears only 98 times. The total frequency of "We" and "we" is 550 times, which is significantly less than that of the report to the 20th National Congress. The two reports share many repetitive high-frequency words, such as "Party, China, Chinese, our, development," reflecting the continuity and inheritance of the two reports' original intentions. "People" is undoubtedly a high-frequency word in the two reports.

The use of modal verbs has also attracted our attention. In the report to the 19th National Congress, "must" is used 158 times, while in the report to the 20th National Congress, "must" appears only 108 times, showing a significant decrease in frequency. However, the high-frequency word "will" has shone in the report to the 20th National Congress, appearing 493 times, compared with only 345 times in the report to the 19th National Congress, reflecting the strong will of the Communist Party of China to seek happiness for the Chinese people and rejuvenation for the Chinese nation. "Should" is used less frequently in both reports, appearing 93 times in the report to the 19th National Congress and only 38 times in the report to the 20th National Congress. Palmer proposed that "should" belongs to the obligation modality and "will" belongs to the dynamic modality, indicating willingness([3]). The use of "will" in the report to the 20th National Congress instead of "should" better reflects the proactive attitude of the Communist Party of China in striving for happiness for the people.

### 3.1 Collocation words with "national security"

The English translation of the report to the 20th National Congress reflects the changing times. It shifts the emphasis from "economy" to "security". For the first time, the report provided a systematic elaboration on national security as an independent section. Security is the highest concern of the leaders, and China has more security issues to worry about than five years ago. "National security" appeared 31 times in the English version of the report to the 20th National Congress, compared to only 13 times in the 19th report. In the future, the Communist Party of China will pay more attention to geopolitical and ideological security issues, moving away from its previous emphasis on economic development. There is a rich variety of verbs that accompany "national security," such as "strengthen, consolidate, modernize, ensure, uphold, protect, safeguard, promote," among others. Among them, "to modernize national security" is a relatively novel concept, which emphasizes the importance of modernizing national security and reflects the wisdom of the Communist Party of China to coordinate the modernization of national security and national development. The English version of the report to the 20th National Congress accurately and vividly elaborated on the importance of national security, more comprehensively, richly, and profoundly than ever before.

In addition to mentioning "national security," the English version of the report to the 20th National Congress also mentions various traditional and non-traditional "security" issues, such as "ecological security, social security, political security, universal security," among others. These discussions related to "security" reflect comprehensiveness, richness, and scientificity.

### 3.2 From "build" to "boost" and "promote"

In the report to the 19th National Congress, "building a digital China and a smart society" was brought up repeatedly. For instance, "These efforts will provide powerful support for building China's strength in science and technology, product quality, aerospace, cyberspace, and transportation; and for building a digital China and a smart society." While in the report to the 20th National Congress, the saying was changed into "We will advance new industrialization and move faster to boost China's strength in manufacturing, product quality, aerospace, transportation, cyberspace, and digital development." The verb "boost" appears up to 15 times in the report to the 20th National Congress. According to the Collins Advanced English Dictionary (2017), "boost" as a verb has three definitions: first, to lift or raise by pushing from behind or below; second, to advance or aid by speaking well of; promote; third, to increase; raise. The shift from "build" to "boost" also indicates that through the continuous struggle of the entire Party and all the people of all ethnic groups in the country, we have achieved the first centenary goal, and we have comprehensively built a moderately prosperous society on the Chinese mainland. Our Party has sufficient strength and confidence and is marching towards the second centenary goal of building a modern socialist country in an all-round way.

### 3.3 Collocation words with "rejuvenation"

We have noticed that the word "rejuvenation" appears frequently in both the two reports. In the English translation of the report to the 19th National Congress, the verbs that are often paired with "rejuvenation" are "realize" and "achieve." The Collins dictionary explains "achieve" as "If you achieve a particular aim or effect, you succeed in doing it or causing it to happen, usually after a lot of effort." We also searched the BAWE corpus and found that the most common noun collocations with "achieve" are "goals" and "objectives." "Achieve" implies "realizing" "reaching" or "completing" after long-term efforts. We believe that the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation is the greatest dream of the Chinese people since modern times. This dream has entered an irreversible historical process, but there is still a distance to "realize", "reach" or "complete." Therefore, in the English translation of the 20th National Congress report, the verb "achieve" is replaced with "advance." This change of verb use reveals that the Communist Party of China remains committed to its original aspiration of "promoting the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation."

### 3.4 Modality Verbs

When discussing modality systems, Halliday classified modal verbs into three basic intensity levels: high, medium, and low([4]). Using Halliday's classification method, Antconc's Concordance function was used to search for the frequency of each type of modal verb in the two reports.

In the English version of the report to the 20th National Congress, the frequency of medium-intensity modal verbs was the highest at 534 times, followed by high-intensity modal verbs at 108 times, and low-intensity modal verbs at only 23 times. In the report to the 19th National Congress, medium-intensity modal verbs also appeared most frequently at 447 times, followed by high-intensity modal verbs at 158 times, and low-intensity modal verbs at only 23 times. The intensity of modal verbs can reflect the speaker's degree of certainty in statements and suggestions, and can also indirectly reflect the strength of the speaker's tone. The excessive use of high-intensity modal verbs can easily create a sense of strength and oppression, making the tone of the English version of the report to the 19th National Congress seem too strong, while the tone of the 20th Congress report tends to be more gentle, conveying a more friendly attitude of the Communist Party of China and avoiding absolute viewpoints, bringing the speaker closer to the audience while conveying a sense of firmness and affinity.

**Table 2.** Frequency of three intensity levels of modal verbs

Classifications of Modal Verbs		Frequency	
		19th	20th
Low-intensity	can/ may/ could/ might/ dare	23	23
	needn't/ doesn't need to/ didn't need to/ have to	1	0
Medium-intensity	will/ would/ should/ is to/ was to	447	534
	won't/wouldn't/ shouldn't/ isn't/ wasn't to	0	0
High-intensity	must/ ought to/ need/ has to/ had to	158	108
	mustn't/ oughtn't to/ can't/ couldn't/ mayn't/ mightn't/ hasn't to/ hadn't to	0	0

### 3.5 Material Process Verbs

According to Halliday, there are six types of processes which are built into English grammar. They are material process, verbal process, mental process, relational process, behavioral process and existential process([4]). Among them, material process is the dominant one which is the process of "doing". Material processes are about the outer experience of actions.

Looking at the frequently used material process verbs from the perspective of lexical cohesion and semantic prosody, almost all high-frequency material process verbs have positive semantic prosody, such as "improve, develop, promote, strengthen," which are mostly paired with nouns such as "system, management, development, communication, capacity, governance, mechanism,"

indicating the determination and confidence of the Communist Party of China in enhancing governance and development and improving mechanisms and institutions. These verbs are mainly connected with nouns in the form of "V+N" such as "build, establish, create," which are generally paired with nouns and noun phrases such as "community, system, a beautiful/peaceful/modern socialist China, channel, a brighter future, great historic achievements, a powerful collective force, etc". The semantic atmosphere is positive and uplifting, with a high degree of manifestation and saturation of positive semantic prosody. This fully demonstrates the Party's active establishment of various policy systems, efforts to create a safe and beautiful China, broaden channels, form a strong joint force, and jointly build a better future. In terms of the use of material process verbs, the English version of the report to the 20th National Congress reflects the inheritance and continuation of the 19th Congress report. However, in this English version of the report to the 20th National Congress, we find that none of the high-frequency material process verbs have a negative semantic prosody. Positive energy is fully displayed in the use of high-frequency material process verbs. In contrast, the English version of the report to the 19th National Congress also used verbs with negative or neutral semantic prosody for multiple times, such as "oppose, prevent, punish,"

### 4 Mean Sentence Length

Mean sentence length refers to the average length of sentences in a text, which is the average number of characters per sentence. The calculation of mean sentence length is based on the punctuation marks of period, question mark, and exclamation mark. The formula for calculating mean sentence length is: mean sentence length = total number of characters / total number of sentences. Mean sentence length is an important parameter for measuring the difficulty and readability of a text. The longer the sentences, the more difficult the text and the lower the readability. In addition, mean sentence length is also an important parameter for examining translation universals([2]).

**Table3.** Mean sentence length

	19th	20th
total number of sentences	940	979
token	24830	24976
mean sentence length	26.41	25.51

The mean sentence length of the English translation of the Report to the 20th National Congress is shorter than that of the English translation of the 19th Party Congress Report, indicating a decrease in the complexity and difficulty of the text, and an improvement in readability.

### 5 Conclusion

The English translations of the reports to the 19th and 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China are both in line with tradition and up-to-date with the times. They also reflect the new requirements of the party's mission and tasks in the new era, new journey, and new

stage. This study takes corpus-based critical translation studies as the theoretical framework, and uses the English translations of the two Congress Reports as the corpus, referring to the BAWE corpus and using corpus techniques to explore the similarities and differences in the language features of the two reports, and to investigate how the use of modal verbs and material process verbs shape the image of the party. The study found that compared to the English translation of the report to the 19th National Congress, the vocabulary and sentence structures used in the 20th Congress Report are more diverse and concise. The use of modal verbs in the report to the 20th National Congress is significantly less than in the 19th Congress Report, successfully shaping the image of the party as being close to the people; the use of material process verbs in both translations highlights the hardworking and pragmatic nature of the party.

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