

A Study on the Diachronic Evolution of Adverb Translation in the Government Work Report (2001-2024)*

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This study systematically investigates adverb translation in political texts through quantitative and qualitative analysis under the theoretical framework of “political equivalence,” utilizing the Government Work Report (2001-2024) as its database. The research aims to reveal the evolutionary trajectory of translation strategies across different historical periods and their underlying socio-cultural motivations. Findings demonstrate a notable shift in adverb translation strategies within political texts: transitioning from faithful reproduction to adaptive transformation. Throughout this progression, translations maintain discursive coherence while increasingly conforming to English idiomatic conventions, ultimately achieving dynamic equilibrium between accurate conveyance of political connotations and compliance with target-language norms.

Keywords: political texts, adverbs, translation strategies, political discourse system, motivations

Introduction

The translation of political discourse holds particular significance in constructing China’s foreign discourse system. Political literature primarily encompasses works by leaders, documents from the Communist Party and the government, and publications on contemporary China’s national conditions (Huang & Huang, 2021, p. 29). Among these, the Government Work Report (hereafter abbreviated as the GWR) serves as China’s annual political blueprint, systematically summarizing its developmental achievements and outlining strategic directions. As a comprehensive reflection of socialist theory with Chinese characteristics and a crucial text for observing China’s political-economic policy evolution, the GWR demonstrates both the temporal characteristics of political language and innovations in national discourse internationalization, providing rich material for studying diachronic changes in adverb translation strategies.

This study examines the GWR from 2001 to 2024, focusing on adverbs—a lexical category rich in semantic and pragmatic functions—to investigate the evolving strategies of translating political texts across different historical periods. By contextualizing adverb translation within their respective socio-political milieus, the research systematically traces diachronic shifts in English translation approaches and elucidates the underlying socio-cultural motivations driving these changes in an effort to advance the high-quality translation

* **Acknowledgements:** This paper is supported by College Student Innovation Training Program (202410289163Y).
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of political texts, ensuring that China’s voice is communicated more clearly, accurately, and effectively in international discourse.

Research Background and Data Collection

Research Background

Scholarly research on the translation of the GWR has proliferated in recent years. As evidenced by the CNKI database, 846 academic articles addressing GWR translation were retrievable as of March 20, 2024, with the majority published within the past decade (see Figure 1). These studies adopt diverse research perspectives, offering both macro-level examinations of translation frameworks and micro-level analyses of linguistic features. The existing literature constitutes a multifaceted exploration of GWR translation, addressing issues ranging from theoretical applications to practical challenges.

This body of work demonstrates an evolving scholarly emphasis on balancing ideological fidelity with cross-cultural adaptability, reflecting the dual imperatives of preserving political intentionality while enhancing international receptivity.

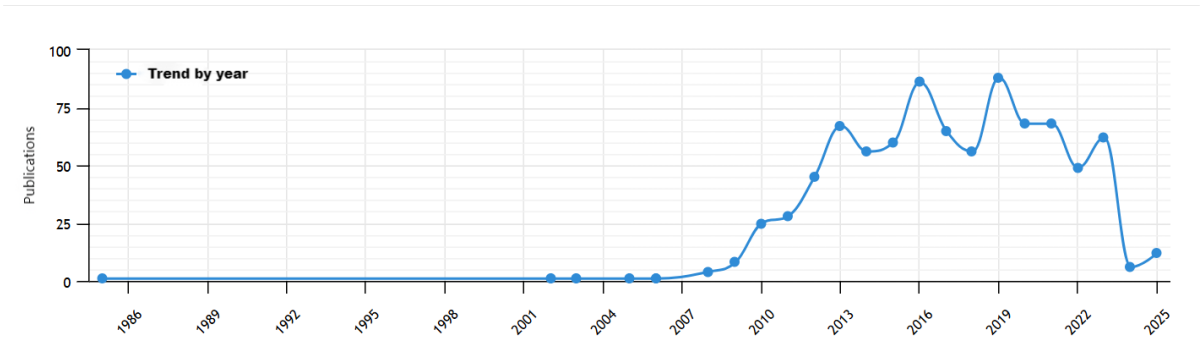


Figure 1. Annual Publication of Research on the Translation of Government Work Report.

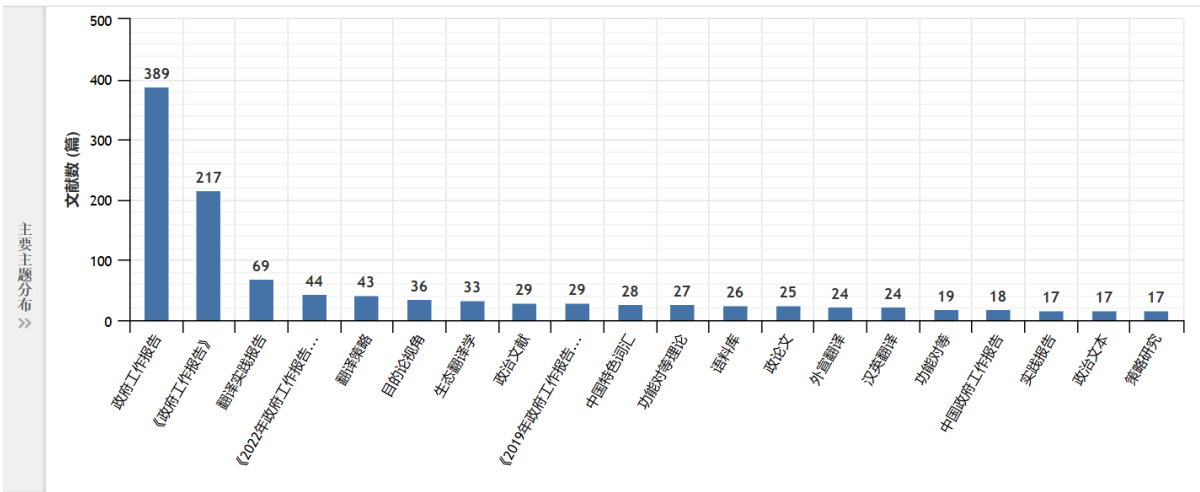


Figure 2. Thematic Distribution of Research Topics on the Translation of Government Work Report.

These studies have conducted in-depth explorations of the translation issues in the GWR from multiple perspectives, providing rich theoretical and practical insights for translation research in this domain. However, to date, no studies have employed corpus-based methods to specifically investigate adverb translation strategies in these political texts. Current academic research on the English translation of the GWR tends to prioritize individual speculative analyses, with fragmented case studies that lack systematic rigor and persuasive power. This project adopts a corpus-driven approach grounded in exhaustive data collection, ensuring objectivity and quantifiability. Through statistical analysis and other empirical methods, it accurately delineates linguistic phenomena and patterns while mitigating the influence of subjective biases.

Data Collection

The data for this study comprises Chinese and English versions of the GWR from 2001 to 2024. The Chinese texts were sourced from official releases on the State Council website, while the English versions were obtained from the Translation Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. During corpus preprocessing, paratexts—such as tables of contents, appendices, tables, annotations, and supplementary notes—were removed to highlight the substantive policy discourse. To enable comparative analysis, the texts were aligned at the sentence level using ABBYY Aligner, followed by manual verification to ensure precision. The resulting sentence-aligned bilingual parallel corpus was further processed with CorpusWordParser for Chinese word segmentation and part-of-speech tagging, while AntConc was employed for English frequency analysis. Manual validation was conducted to ensure data accuracy. The finalized corpus, characterized by high-quality segmentation and annotation, provides a robust foundation for linguistic feature analysis and translation strategy research.

To investigate diachronic changes in adverb translation strategies, high-frequency adverbs were first identified and extracted. Subsequently, FileLocator—a corpus retrieval tool—was utilized to systematically analyze the evolution of translation methods and their underlying motivations. This methodological framework ensures empirical rigor and reproducibility in tracing the adaptive shifts in political text translation over time.

Categorization of Adverbs in Political Texts

In both the Chinese and English linguistic systems, adverbs constitute a pivotal lexical category that plays an irreplaceable role in conveying semantic information regarding manner, degree, scope, temporal relations, and other conceptual dimensions. In Chinese academia, adverbs are generally recognized as a semi-open class, primarily functioning as adverbial modifiers of sentence constituents. However, certain adverbs can also extend their grammatical roles to sentence-initial modifiers, complements, and even serve as higher-level predicates or quasi-attributives in specific contexts, demonstrating multifunctional capacities encompassing restriction, depiction, commentary, and conjunction (Zhang, 2000, p. 54). In contrast, English adverbs are typically categorized as an open-class system, predominantly modifying verbs, adjectives, other adverbs, or entire clauses, exhibiting relatively greater functional flexibility.

Recent academic investigations have developed more refined subclassification frameworks for adverbs through multidimensional analyses of their semantic, syntactic, and pragmatic functions. The semantic classification, as the earliest subcategorization methodology, emphasizes the meaning-expressing functions of adverbs in contextualized usage (Li, 1924). Despite inherent limitations such as the polysemous nature of

certain adverbs that resist singular categorization, this classification system retains significant referential value in studies of English translation strategies for adverbs. It proves particularly instrumental in examining the translation of “adverbs of degree” and “adverbs of manner.”

Building upon this theoretical foundation, the present study adopts a semantic-functional classification framework for adverbs. Guided by corpus-based analytical methods and considering both research objectives and data processing feasibility, we employ the classification system from *Modern Chinese* (6th Revised Edition) edited by Huang Borong and Liao Xudong to categorize adverbs into seven subtypes: manner, degree, frequency, time, place, scope, and negation. While other adverb subclasses typically exhibit higher objectivity in translation, predominantly employing literal translation strategies that fall beyond the primary scope of this study, adverbs of degree and manner demonstrate notable subjectivity in translation practice, allowing translators considerable operational flexibility and diverse processing approaches that merit diachronic investigation. Empirical analysis reveals negligible variation in the translation methods of adverbs of degree within the corpus of Government Work Reports (2001-2024). Therefore, this study prioritizes the evolutionary analysis of translation strategies for adverbs of manner.

A Statistical Analysis of the Strategy in Translating Adverbs of Manner in Political Texts

Adverbs of manner demonstrate high frequency and continuous expansion in both quantitative usage and contextual applicability (Xu, 2023, p. 2). Aligning with established definitions, the adverbs of manner under investigation denote the manner, temporal dimension, or sequence of verbal actions, functioning primarily to modify and restrict these aspects. In political discourse, such adverbs frequently articulate the methods, channels, and mechanisms of decision-making, policy implementation, or ideological dissemination. This study selects the top five most frequently-used adverbs of manner from the GWR (2001-2024) as primary research subjects. Through systematic analysis of their translation strategies, this research uncovers patterns of diachronic variation and elucidates the underlying linguistic-cultural motivations driving these translational shifts. Table 1 presents the statistical results.

Table 1
Frequency Distribution of Top Five Most Frequently Used Adverbs of Manner

		全面	积极	大力	切实	逐步
Total Hits		788	708	376	219	135
Period	2001-2008	202	281	137	96	73
	2009-2016	259	261	160	79	49
	2017-2024	327	166	79	44	13

Building upon the preceding quantitative framework, the author systematically examines the translation patterns and strategic approaches for each adverb, subsequently ranking the frequency of translation methods per lexical item as shown in Table 2.

Table 2
Frequency-Ranked Translation Strategies for Adverbs of Manner

	全面	积极	大力	切实	逐步
Translation	Adverb->Adverb	Adverb->Adverb	Adverb->Adverb	Adverb->Adverb	Adverb->Adverb
	Adverb->Special	Omission	Adverb->General	Omission	Adverb->Special

strategies employed	Structure		Verb+Adverb		Structure
	Omission	Adverb->Specific Verb with a Degree Meaning	Adverb->General Verb+Adjective+ Noun	Adverb->Special Structure	Adverb->General Verb+Adverb
	Adverb->Specific Verb with a Degree Meaning	Adverb->General Verb+Adverb	Adverb->Specific Verb with a Degree Meaning	Adverb->General Verb+Adverb	Omission
	Adverb->General Verb+Adverb	/	Adverb->Specific Verb with a Degree Meaning+Noun	/	/
	/	/	Adverb->Special Structure	/	/
	/	/	Omission	/	/

The statistics show that both literal and paraphrastic approaches have been adopted in the English translation of adverbs of manner across all periods, with literal translation demonstrating the highest overall frequency of application. Concurrently, a gradual decline in the general usage frequency is evident over time.

It should be noted that the current analysis primarily focuses on the five most frequent adverbs of manner. By scrutinizing these high-frequency adverbs, preliminary patterns of their functional regularities in political texts and evolutionary trends in translation strategies can be discerned, establishing a methodological and conceptual framework for subsequent in-depth studies.

The English Translation of the Adverb 大力 Based on Political Equivalence: A Case Study

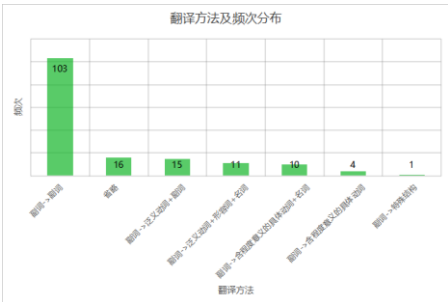
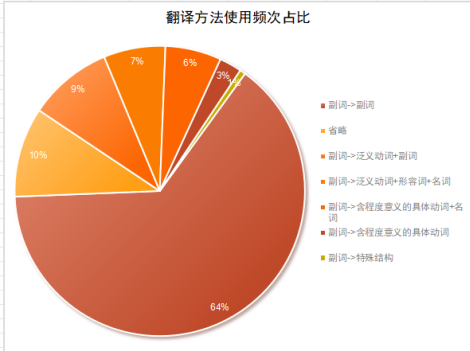
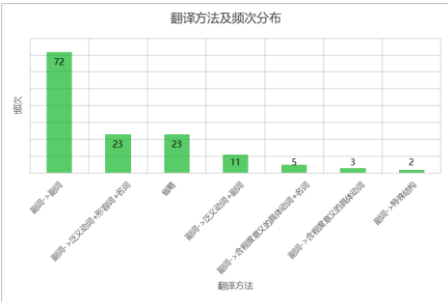
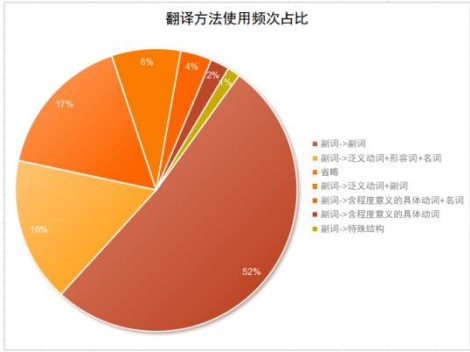
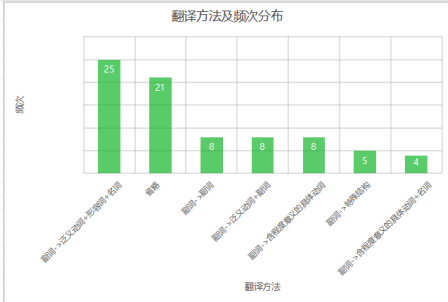
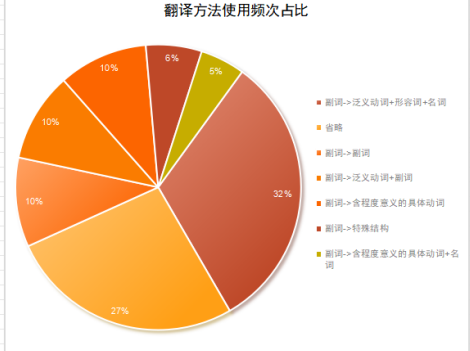
As demonstrated in Table 2, the adverb 大力 (*dali*) exhibits the most diverse and dynamic translation strategies. By dissecting the translational adaptations of this high-frequency adverb under the framework of “political equivalence,” this study elucidates the socio-linguistic and ideological motivations driving strategic shifts in rendering politically sensitive lexical items.

The theory of “Political Equivalence”—proposed by Yang Mingxing as a creative extension of Eugene A. Nida’s “Equivalent Effect”—is specifically tailored to political translation. Grounded in contemporary diplomatic and political discourse practices, this framework prioritizes equivalence in political connotation over mere formal correspondence. By integrating its three defining characteristics—political intentionality, dynamic adaptation, and equilibrium maintenance—the theory enhances the understanding of translation strategies and evolutionary motivations for adverbs in the GWR.

Evolution of Strategies in Translating 大力

Through exhaustive data statistics, a diachronic change is evidently displayed in the following table.

Table 3
Diachronic Frequency Distribution of Translation Methods for 大力

Period	Translation Methods	Frequency Proportion (%)
2001-2008		
2009-2016		
2017-2024		

The statistical results reveal a notable shift in the degree of translational “strictness” versus “flexibility” regarding the rendering of the term 大力, demonstrating a clear transition from initial faithful reproduction to adaptive transformation over time:

(1) **2001-2008:** During this period, the **Adverb->Adverb** translation method predominated, accounting for 52% of the total instances, which indicates the prevalent adoption of a literal translation strategy at this stage. Additionally, the **Adverb->General Verb+Adjective+Noun** approach emerged as a moderately frequent method, constituting 16% of cases. The omission strategy was employed in 17% of instances, suggesting that translators employed a strategy of textual simplification to some extent during this phase. Other translation methods—including **Adverb->General Verb+Adverb** (8%), **Adverb->Specific Verb with a Degree**

Meaning (2%), **Adverb->Specific Verb with a Degree Meaning+Noun** (4%), and **Adverb->Special Structure** (1%)—demonstrated comparatively lower frequencies of application.

(2) **2009-2016**: During this period, the **Adverb->Adverb** translation method remained predominant, accounting for 64% of the total instances (a notable increase from the prior phase), which underscores the further reinforcement of literal translation strategies at this stage. The **Adverb->General Verb+Adverb** approach was utilized in 9% of cases, reflecting a modest rise compared to the preceding period. Conversely, the **Adverb->General Verb+Adjective+Noun** method declined to 7%, indicating a reduced reliance on this translation technique. Meanwhile, the frequencies of **Adverb->Specific Verb with a Degree Meaning** (7%), **Adverb->Specific Verb with a Degree Meaning+Noun** (6%), and **Adverb->Special Structure** (6%) demonstrated gradual increases, suggesting a growing adoption of these strategies. The omission strategy, employed in 10% of instances, marked a decline relative to the earlier phase, highlighting a shift away from textual simplification in this context.

(3) **2017-2024**: During this period, the **Adverb->Adverb** translation method plummeted to 10% in frequency, signifying a substantial reduction in the application of literal translation strategies at this stage. Conversely, the **Adverb->General Verb+Adjective+Noun** approach emerged as one of the predominant methods, with its usage surging to 32%, reflecting a strategic shift in translation practices. The **Adverb->General Verb+Adverb** method accounted for 10% of cases, demonstrating a modest increase compared to the preceding phase. Meanwhile, the frequencies of **Adverb->Specific Verb with a Degree Meaning** (10%), **Adverb->Specific Verb with a Degree Meaning+Noun** (5%), and **Adverb->Special Structure** (6%) exhibited a gradual upward trend, indicating incremental adoption of these techniques. Notably, the omission strategy experienced a sharp rise to 27%, underscoring translators' heightened preference for textual simplification strategies during this phase.

Causal Analysis of Translation Method Shifts Based on the “Political Equivalence” Principle

The use of adverbs in the GWR (2001-2024) is closely tied to the discursive practices of distinct historical periods which not only determine the patterns of adverb usage in the source text but also profoundly shape the selection of English translation strategies. By comparing adverb characteristics between the source and target texts, patterns of translation strategy selection can be systematically summarized, revealing their underlying discursive motivations. However, discursive practices do not exist in isolation; they are rooted within broader sociopolitical practices which provide an external framework for discursive practices, prescribing their goals and directions, thereby shaping linguistic choices at the textual level. Concurrently, while discursive practices reflect the demands of sociopolitical practices, they also exert a reciprocal influence on them. Consequently, investigating the diachronic evolution of adverb translation strategies and their sociocultural motivations holds significant value. Translation transcends mere linguistic transposition; “the expansive sociocultural space unfolded through its process enables a deeper understanding of the complexity and significance of translational activities, while also contributing to grasping the essence of translation itself” (Xu, 2003, p. 39).

The English translations of the GWR (2001-2024) span a pivotal era marked by China's deepened reform and opening-up, rapid economic growth, and elevated international stature. During this period, China actively engaged in globalization, committed to constructing an open economic system, while amplifying its voice on

the global stage to disseminate Chinese wisdom and Chinese solutions. Consequently, the translation of these reports not only serves to communicate China's developmental achievements and policy orientations to the international community but also functions as a strategic instrument to enhance China's discursive power, project a responsible major-power image, and contribute Chinese experiences to global governance.

Within this context, the translation of the GWR has undergone a strategic transition—from an early emphasis on “textual faithfulness” to a “balanced fidelity-readability” paradigm. While prioritizing content accuracy, increasing attention has been directed toward target-reader receptivity and comprehension efficacy. Adverb translation, as represented by adverbs of manner such as 大力 (*dali*, “vigorously”), now demonstrate greater semantic flexibility in English renditions which preserve the authoritativeness and rigor of the source text while incorporating context-adaptive liberal translation and domestication strategies to enhance textual fluency.

The period 2001-2008 coincided with China's deepened reform and opening-up and rapid economic development, during which the political discourse system had not yet been fully standardized. The years 2009-2016 marked a critical phase in the gradual standardization of China's political discourse. As one of China's most important political texts, the GWR was translated to facilitate the understanding and perception of Chinese policies by international communities. The use of literal translation strategies maximized the preservation of the source text's linguistic structures and political connotations, avoiding potential semantic deviations or informational loss that might arise from liberal translation. Consequently, the significantly higher frequency of literal translation in these two stages reflects the prioritization of translation accuracy during China's political discourse standardization.

From 2017 to 2024, alongside China's rising international status and increasing demands for international communication, translation strategies shifted, with a higher frequency of liberal translation and domestication strategies. This change indicates a greater focus on target-reader acceptability and comprehension effectiveness in China's external communication, as well as the dynamic adaptation of translation strategies to new sociocultural needs.

Additionally, factors such as changes in the composition of translation teams, translators' professional competencies, and strategic preferences within translator communities across different stages may have contributed to the diachronic shifts in adverb translation. These factors require further investigation.

Conclusion

The English translation strategies for Chinese political texts are profoundly shaped by historical contexts, discursive practices, and translation objectives. Political discourse across different periods exhibits distinctive characteristics in adverb usage, with corresponding translation norms inevitably bearing the imprint of their respective eras. Currently, the translation of Chinese political texts must remain faithful to the original political stance while increasingly aligning with the requirements of national communication capacity-building in the new era. This entails ensuring not only the accuracy and authoritativeness of translations but also prioritizing the cultural contexts and linguistic conventions of target audiences to improve textual acceptability and dissemination efficacy as demonstrated in the translation of adverbs in the GWR.

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