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Translation Strategies of Numerical Phrases in the Government Work Report

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Abstract

Numerical phrases usually refer to expressions where the common part is extracted when describing several similar things, with a number prefixed to the word. This form avoids redundancy caused by overly long texts, making expressions concise, powerful, and highly expressive. This study takes the original texts and official translations of numerical phrases in the 2019-2023 Government Work Report (hereinafter referred to as the "Report") as the corpus, and explores the translation strategies of numerical phrases through literature research and self-built corpus methods. Through the construction and retrieval of the self-built corpus, it is found that the translation of numerical phrases in the Report mainly includes five methods: literal translation, literal translation with paraphrasing, free translation, ignoring and not translating, and modifying translation. This study provides references for researchers and translation learners engaged in political text translation, and makes up for the shortcomings of existing studies to a certain extent.

Keywords

Government work report; Numerical phrases; Translation strategy

1. Introduction

Numerical phrases are widely used in daily life and political discourse in China. However, accurately translating these phrases into English poses a challenge. Numerals not only indicate quantity but also sequence, and their meanings have remained consistent in ancient and modern Chinese literature. They play an important role in traditional Chinese poetry and literature, as well as in contemporary dialects and daily language. Due to their direct and accurate connotations, Chinese numerical phrases are frequently used in political documents. In recent years, with China's expanding opening-up, an increasing number of foreigners have been living and working in China, leading to a growing demand for understanding the work of Chinese governments at all levels. Therefore, English versions of government political publicity materials have gradually emerged. Translating government political texts into foreign languages not only meets the

international community's need to understand the work of Chinese governments but also achieves the goal of government external publicity. With their unparalleled status and unique characteristics, numerical phrases carry rich connotations.

By sorting out scholars' research on the translation of the Government Work Report, it is found that most studies focus on the textual functions and translation purposes of political papers. Based on the Chinese and English versions of the Report, these studies analyze the textual characteristics and translation strategies of political papers from lexical, syntactic, and rhetorical perspectives, illustrated with examples. The research methods adopted mainly rely on various translation theories such as Skopos Theory, Functional Equivalence Theory, and Eco-translatology. However, there are few studies on the translation strategies of numerical phrases, especially those using self-built corpora. This paper aims to draw attention to this translation phenomenon and hopes that more translation researchers, learners, and enthusiasts will focus on this research field. By addressing these detailed issues, we can collectively improve the level of China's external publicity translation, construct China's discourse power, and accelerate the internationalization of Chinese culture.

This paper intends to establish a political text corpus to study the translation of numerical phrases in the Central People's Government Work Report over the past five years. The author used BFSU Qualitative Coder 1.1, a software developed by Beijing Foreign Studies University (retrieved from http://corpus.bfsu.edu.cn/TOOLS.htm), to construct and systematically summarize a corpus of numerical phrases from the 2019-2023 Reports, dividing the translation strategies into five categories: literal translation, literal translation with paraphrasing, free translation, modifying translation, and ignoring and not translating. As China's highest-level political document, the Report holds a certain degree of authority. Therefore, analyzing the translation of numerical phrases in the Report can provide a good model for the publicity work of domestic media and the translation of political documents.

2. Research Design

This chapter presents the research design, providing a data basis for the subsequent classification and translation strategies of numerical phrases. It is divided into four parts: research object, research questions, research methods, and specific operation steps.

2.1. Research Object

This study examines the numerical phrases in the Chinese and English versions of the Report from 2019 to 2023.

2.2. Research Questions

(1) How many numerical phrases are there in the Reports over the past five years,

and what are their characteristics?
(2) What translation strategies are adopted for these numerical phrases?

2.3. Research Methods

This study mainly uses literature research and self-built corpus for analysis. Through literature analysis, similarities and differences between existing studies are identified to lay the foundation for this research. By constructing a parallel corpus of the Report, the original Chinese texts and English translations of the Reports released by the Chinese government over the past five years are collected. The author retrieved BFSU Qualitative Coder 1.1, a software independently developed by Beijing Foreign Studies University, from http://corpus.bfsu.edu.cn/TOOLS.htm, and used it to construct a corpus for the systematic induction and summary of numerical phrases in the 2019-2023 Reports.

2.4. Specific Operation Steps

First, search for bilingual versions of the Reports online, import them into Word, align them sentence by sentence, and mark the text carrier in RTF format. Second, compile a coding list (as shown in Figure 1), which can be applied to other scenarios such as composition revision and the construction of other corpora. Third, design an identification system: import color brushes for classification to facilitate later annotation and categorization of the corpus. After completing the above preparations, conduct coding operations: for example, select the Chinese phrase "三孩政策" (three-child policy), click "numerical phrase" in the first text for annotation, then select the corresponding English translation and click "literal translation" in the second text. Repeat this process to select and analyze all numerical phrases in the texts, summarizing the five translation strategies. Finally, click "Statistics" to view the results, which will generate an HTML file showing the frequency of each translation strategy (as shown in Figure 2). The 2019 Government Work Report is taken as an example for demonstration.

3. Characteristics of Numerical Phrases (2019-2023)

A total of 188 numerical phrases (including repetitions) were identified, featuring distinct structural, semantic, and pragmatic traits.

3.1. Structural Characteristics

The numeral phrase is a language form that summarizes the number of items in a series of parallel words (words, phrases, sentences, etc.) using numbers, and then extracts the common morphemes in each word to form a "numeral + common morpheme" format. The number of items of the series of words that have been summarized often have the same structure, similar meanings, and more than two items. According to this definition and the research results of Li (2020), the structural

characteristics of numerical words can be classified into five categories.

The following is the analysis of numerical words in the "Report" over the past five: years. As shown in the figure:

Structure	Source language	Target language
Number + Noun	一国两制	One country,two systems
Number + Verb	三去一降一补	In the five priority tasks:to strengthen the dynamism of micro entities; to upgrade industrial chains; and to ensure unimpeded flows in the economy, thus moving toward high-quality development.
Number + Adjective	一个中心，两个基本点	One central task,two basic points
Number + Adverb	四个全面	Comprehensively completing the building of a moderately prosperous society, comprehensively deepening reform, comprehensively governing the country according to law and comprehensively enforcing strict Party discipline.
Number + Generic Noun	三步走战略	The three-step development strategy

When we examine the above table, it is evident that the numerical words possess distinct structural features and can be classified into five categories. The first category consists of the combination of numbers and nouns, which are used to quantify or specify the objects being discussed. The second type of numerical words involves combining numbers with verbs to indicate repeated actions. In contrast, the third category involves combining numbers with adjectives to describe qualities such as size, weight, or quantity. The fourth type of numerical words pairs numbers with adverbs to modify verbs and provide additional information about frequency or intensity. Finally, the fifth category includes the combination of numbers and category nouns, where category nouns are words that categorize objects based on common characteristics into specific groups. In summary, understanding these different types of numerical words can help us better comprehend them and thus employ various translation strategies to translate them.

3.2. Semantic Characteristics

1. Quantitative Meaning: Indicating quantity (e.g., "三年行动计划" → "three-year action plan").

2. Ordinal Meaning: Denoting sequence (e.g., "十四五" 规划 → "the 14th Five-Year Plan").

3. Temporal Meaning: Expressing time (e.g., "长江十年禁渔" → "ten-year fishing ban in the Yangtze River").

4. Range Meaning: Signifying a quantity range (e.g., "近千万家庭" → "nearly 10 million households").

These semantic features enable numerical words to play different roles in language and express different meanings. The meaning of numerical words should be understood based on the specific context and language environment.

3.3. Pragmatic Characteristics

In political literature, numerical words possess specific pragmatic features. Here are some common characteristics. The first one is called statistical and data support, which means that numerical words are frequently used in political documents to provide statistical data and data support. They can be used to describe election results, public opinion polls, economic indicators, demographics, etc. The use of numbers can enhance the accuracy and credibility of the information. For example, "the third national Soil survey" is translated as "the third national Soil survey". The second one is comparison and contrast. That is to say, in political literature, numerical words can be used for comparison and contrast. They can be used to describe the differences between different policies, countries or regions, such as economic growth rates, unemployment rates, environmental pollution levels, etc. By comparing the numbers, the similarities or differences of policies or situations can be highlighted.

4. Translation Strategies and Case Analysis of Numerical Terms in the "Report" from 2019 to 2023

Table 1. The frequency of using the five translation strategies

Year	Literal translation	Literal translation plus explanation	liberal translation	omission	adaptation
2019	23	11	26	3	3
2020	21	10	9	3	2
2021	23	5	5	0	1
2022	30	11	7	3	2
2023	30	14	6	2	2

Table 1 presents the statistical results of the digital word processing carried out by BFSU Qualitative Coder 1.1 on the original database and the translated database of the "Report".

This study constructed a corpus using the BFSU Qualitative Coder 1.1 software. Specifically, the corpus was established over the past five years by adjusting the sentence-level content of the original and translated versions of the report. This process created a parallel Chinese-English corpus for the report. Then, using the parallel search method, the numerical words in the original text and their corresponding English translations were obtained. Through detailed comparison and comprehensive analysis, this study identified five strategies for the English translation of numerical words.

Therefore, as can be seen from Table 1, the translation of numerical words in the report, apart from some specific numerical translations, is mainly based on literal translation. Literal translation means that, without violating the traditions of the English language and culture, in English translations, the form and the meaning referred to in the Chinese language are fully retained, thus achieving the unity of content and form. Secondly, interpretation is supplementary because although literal translation helps to preserve the concise form of the Chinese words used for

numerical expressions, it is not conducive to readers' understanding of their specific meanings. Therefore, translators can sometimes adopt interpretation to maintain the integrity of the original text's symbolic meaning. It is worth noting that when these numerical words gradually become accepted and familiar to foreign readers, translators can translate them word for word without any annotations, thus achieving the simplicity of translation. In terms of numerical words, the main method of translation is literal translation, followed by interpretation. Translation is the least preferred method. This trend is particularly evident in the reports of the past five years, with literal translation accounting for 67.5%, literal translation with explanations accounting for 27%, interpretation accounting for 28%, and only 5% of the translations involve omission or modification. Therefore, it is clear that political literature mainly relies on the two methods of literal translation and interpretation when dealing with the expression of numerical words.

4.1. Case Study

In this section, based on the table, we will conduct case analysis and comparison between Chinese and English using five translation strategies: literal translation, literal translation with explanation, idiomatic translation, omission, and paraphrasing.

4.1.1. Literal Translation

Although sometimes English readers may not get exactly the same feelings as the original readers through literal translation, at least this form of retention can give people the feeling of the original text, allowing the images and associations in their minds to be as close as possible to the impact of the original text on the readers.

Example 1: 深入贯彻落实科学发展观，要求我们始终坚持 “一个中心、两个基本点” 的基本路线。

The basic line of "一个中心、两个基本点" is translated as basic line of taking economic development as the central task and upholding the Four Cardinal Principles and the reform and opening up policy known as“one central task and two basic points”

Example 2:十六大以来,我们以邓小平理论和“三个代表”重要思想为指导。

“三个代表”重要思想: the important thought of Three Represents.

To thoroughly implement the Scientific Outlook on Development requires us to always adhere to the basic line of taking economic development as the central task and upholding the Four Cardinal Principles and the reform and opening up policy, which is known as "one central task and two basic points".

Example 3:“两德模式”不能用于解决台湾问题。

“两德模式”： two German states formula.

For the examples mentioned above, in English, almost identical single numerical words can often be found. Therefore, the direct translation method is adopted. On

one hand, while maintaining the style characteristics of the original text, it achieves the simplicity of the translation form and the accuracy of content transmission. On the other hand, it can also give the target language readers a sense of mystery, stimulating their desire to understand the source language culture, thereby strengthening cross-cultural communication and promoting the dissemination of Chinese culture.

4.1.2. Literal Translation with Explanations

When English readers are unfamiliar with the numerical words in the original text, or when these numerical words are first appearing, the translator should maintain the simplicity and vividness of the numbers in the literal translation, while also providing necessary explanations to ensure that the readers of the translation can understand the meaning of the numbers. There are three common strategies:

(1) Explanation + Literal Translation

This strategy is mainly used to convert the basic policies of the Party and the state into numerical form. Generally speaking, the connotation of numerical terms should be explained first, so as to lay the groundwork for the translation readers to accept the literal translation of the numerical terms and lay a solid foundation for the translation readers to accurately understand the connotation of the original text. For example:

Example 4: 我们党把坚持四项基本原则同坚持改革开放结合起来。

四项基本原则：the Four Cardinal Principles (The Four Cardinal Principles are to keep to the socialist road and to uphold the people's democratic dictatorship leadership by the Communist Party and Marxism—Leninism and Mao Zedong Thought.) with adhering to the reform and opening up policy.

(2) Direct Translation + Interpretation

If the explanation is lengthy, it will appear as a complete sentence. In this case, the translator tends to place the explanation after the literal numerical terms to maintain the beauty and readability of the translation sentence structure.

Example 5: 近年来，国家多渠道筹集资金设立中小学助学金，并由政府拨款实行免书本费、免杂费、补助寄宿生生活费的"两免一补"政策，重点扶持中西部农村地区家庭经济困难学生就学。

In recent years，the state has raised money from many channels for grants to students in primary and middle schools.Under one policy known as "Two Exemptions and One Allowance",the government provides subsidies so that students from families with financial difficulties in rural areas,particularly in central and west China，are exempt from paying textbook fees and other fees,and students attending boarding schools get allowances.

In Example 5, who are the subjects of "two exemptions" and "one supplement"? Who are the beneficiaries? What goals are to be achieved? The translator must take these factors into account when translating. These contents cover a wide range and are

hidden outside the text. Therefore, the translator uses complete sentences to explain them, so as to provide complete information to the readers of the translation.

(3) Direct Translation + [Meaning]

The explanations in the brackets are usually phrase sentences, and the content in the brackets shares the key words with the textual and numerical words.

Example 6: 继续做好"两个确保"和城市"低保"工作。

We continued successful efforts to provide the "two guarantees"［guarantee of a basic living allowance for workers laid off from state-owned enterprises and guarantee that the pensions of retirees are paid on time and in full］ and ensure needy urban residents receive subsistence allowances.

In Example 6, "两个确保" is directly translated as "two guarantees", and the meaning within the parentheses is interpreted as a noun phrase, with the key word being "guarantee".

Generally speaking, since some Chinese abbreviations contain rich cultural information of Chinese culture, which is unique to Chinese, translating them directly may not be easily understood by foreign readers. In this category, numerical words can be translated into English first and then supplemented, which not only retains the language style of the original text but also serves a similar purpose. Undoubtedly, this kind of translation gives foreign readers a more intuitive impression, so it is widely used.

4.1.3. Literal Translation

Literal translation is a method of interpreting the connotations of numerical words by avoiding the formal characteristics of "numbers" and "phrases". Some numerical words have strong Chinese political and cultural overtones. Although English abbreviations have corresponding structural forms, direct translation may not make sense. To facilitate the understanding of English listeners, it is a better approach to explain all the information contained in the abbreviations in a more specific way. This translation strategy mainly reflects the functional equivalence of the deep structure rather than the formality of the surface structure. Although the translated text is not as concise as the original, it still reflects the basic information function of the original text.

Example 7：推动直接"三通"使彼此感情更融洽、合作更深化。

"三通"：direct links of mail transport and trade.

"三通" refers to "postal services, commercial activities and shipping services". Without the corresponding cultural connotations attached, the recipients of the translation would not be able to fully understand the specific aspirations of the Chinese government to promote the peaceful reunification of the two sides of the Taiwan Strait.

4.1.4. Omitting Translation

The numerical words in the original text are not translated at all. To compensate for the possible loss of information, the translator will adopt some compensatory measures, such as using comparative sentence structures to imply an increase in quantity.

Example 8：加快建设“万村千乡”市场工程，推进连锁经营向农村延伸。

We will accelerate the project to encourage retailers to open stores in more townships and villages，and encourage commercial chains to open more outlets in rural areas.

In Example 8, the phrase "万村千乡" cannot be found in the translation. The reason is that the comparative sentence structure oriented towards "more" in the translation already conveys the meaning of the original text.

4.1.5. Re-translation

When the numerical words in the original text are not precise and cause ambiguity, translators often adopt the adaptation strategy during the translation process. In a sense, translation is an interpretive translation. The numerical words in the original text no longer exist in the translation. There are three specific translation methods:

(1) Increment

The term "increment" refers to the situation where, when dealing with the numerical words in the original text, the translator realizes that the information provided by these words is insufficient and literal translation would lead to misunderstandings. Additionally, in Chinese culture, "four" is homophonic with "death", so sometimes even if the number is four, it is deliberately avoided in actual expression. Therefore, during the translation process, the translator will supplement the information to cause an increase in quantity.

Example 9: 重点搞好“三河三湖”(淮河海河辽河、太湖巢湖滇池) 、南水北调水源及沿线、三峡库区、松花江等流域污染防治。

“三河三湖”: “the Huai，Hai，Liao and Songhua rivers，Tai，Chao and Dianchi lakes.”

"三河" became "Huai, Hai, Liao and Songhua Rivers", and "three" became "four".

(2) Condensing numbers

When the numerical terms in the original Chinese text represent vague numerical concepts, and in the English translation, there are expressions that either exaggerate the original quantity by several times (which are either cumbersome or inconsistent with the facts), or expressions that reduce the original quantity, the condensation translation strategy is adopted.

Example 10: 从 2001 年起,中国组织实施了“亿万老年人健身活动”,吸引更多老年人参加到体育健身行列中来。目前，全国参加经常性体育健身活动的老年人达 5800 多万人。

Translation: Since2001,the“Millions of Seniors’ Fitness Exercise Activities”organized in China have attracted more and more senior participants，so it is estimated that

there are now more than 58 million elderly people doing regular sports and fitness exercises in China.

In 10 cases, if the English expression "One Hundred Million Seniors' Fitness Exercises Activities" is used to translate "Billion Elderly People's Fitness Activities", it is both cumbersome and unrealistic. "Billions" is merely an estimate. If we use "Dozens of Billions..." it contradicts the fact that the number of elderly people in China has not reached this figure. When translating, the translator adopted the abbreviation strategy of "Million...", although it is not as large as "Billion", but it is sufficient to represent "Elderly People's Fitness Activities" and benefit many people.

(3) Conversion

Due to the differences in cultural habits between Chinese and English, some expressions that are acceptable in Chinese need to be translated using different words in English to conform to the cultural customs of English-speaking countries. For instance, in Chinese we can say "the price is high", but in English we would say "The price is high" or "It is expensive", because in English-speaking countries, there is only high price and no low price. Similar situations also occur in Chinese numerical words. In such cases, the translator can adopt the strategy of changing the translation of key words in the numerical words.

Example 11: 政府投资使用要确保“三个高于”，即: 用于直接改善农村生产生活条件的投入高于上年，用于基础教育和公共卫生等社会事业的投入高于上年，用于西部大开发的投入高于上年。

Translation：Increase in three areas”must be ensured in the use of government funds，i.e.a year－on－year increase in investment to directly improve living and working conditions in rural areas，investment in social programs such as elementary education and public health，and investment in the large－scale development of the western region.

In Example 11, the word "high" in "three highs" refers to an increase in investment in social undertakings such as improving rural production and living conditions, basic education, public health, and the Western Development Program compared to the previous year, resulting in an increase in total investment compared to the previous year. Therefore, the investment should be increased first, and then "above". When translating "three highs" into English, the translator changed the key words in the original structure to "increase".

5. Summary

This paper, based on the literature research method and the self-built corpus, conducted a study and analysis of the numerical words in the "Report" from 2019 to 2023. The research found that there were a large number of numerical words in the "Report". Over the past three years, a total of 188 numerical words were repeated, including but not limited to, translations without specifying numerical values, only selecting numerical words. By studying the translation of numerical words in the

"Report", the following conclusions can be drawn: Firstly, numerical words can be analyzed from three features: structure, semantics, and pragmatics. Different features can lead to different translation strategies. For numerical words, direct translation is still the main translation method, followed by interpretation, and translation is the least. This is particularly evident in the "Report" of the past five years, with direct translation accounting for 67.5%, direct translation plus interpretation accounting for 27%, interpretation accounting for 28%, and only 5% being ignored or retranslated. It can be seen that the translation of numerical words in political literature mainly relies on direct translation and interpretation. By learning the translation methods of numerical words in the "Report", other propaganda translators and translation enthusiasts can obtain some references. At the same time, translators need to continuously improve their awareness of being reader-centered and do a good job in the translation of propaganda documents, so that they can play a role in international communication, in order to tell China's story well.

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