

The Use and Explanation of Comparative Degrees in the English Translation of the Report to the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China: A Case Study of “Better” and “Further”



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ABSTRACT: Wang Jianguo and He Ziran (2014) proposed that Chinese and English show pragmatic differences in their emphasis: Chinese emphasizes process, while English emphasizes outcomes. Consequently, English translations often convey meanings that are implicit in or exceed those of the original Chinese text. Based on this observation, this paper hypothesizes that many comparative adjectives or adverbs in English translations originate from positive (base form) adjectives or adverbs in Chinese, or sometimes have no corresponding Chinese adjectives or adverbs at all. By examining the sources of “better” and “further” in the English version of the 20th National Congress Report, this paper confirms this hypothesis, enhancing our understanding of Chinese-English pragmatic differences and providing insights for similar Chinese-English translation research and practice.

KEYWORDS: 20th National Congress Report; English comparative degree; Chinese-English translation; better; further

1. INTRODUCTION

The main pragmatic difference between Chinese and English lies in Chinese being process-oriented while English is result-oriented (Wang Jianguo & He Ziran, 2014). Wang Jianguo (2019) explains that “process orientation” refers to how speakers focus on procedures when perceiving events, while “result orientation” focuses on event outcomes. Of course, this conclusion is pragmatic rather than rule-based - in appropriate contexts, Chinese process orientation may focus on results, and English result orientation may focus on processes.

Building on the cognitive semantic foundation that “process meaning precedes result meaning,” Bao Chuanyun (2022) points out that cognitively, Chinese expresses the front end of an event while English expresses the back end. Since results imply processes, and the front end of an event presupposes the back end, Chinese-English translation typically shows that English translations often contain implicit meanings or exceed the meanings expressed in the original Chinese text. For example, “你先走” (you go first) is expressed as “After you” in English, reflecting the relationship between front and back ends, with the latter presupposing the former and containing richer meaning.

Based on this, this paper hypothesizes that when Chinese gradable adjectives and adverbs are in their positive form, Chinese-

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English translation often results in comparative forms in English translations, because comparative meanings presuppose positive meanings and are semantically richer.

Chinese and English each have their own comparison category systems. English has clear grammatical rules for marking comparisons. Chinese comparison categories are relatively complex, with the “比” (bi) structure being the core comparative form. There are several other debatable comparative category members, including “越...越...” (the more...the more), “连...都/也...” (even), “很” (very), “比较” (relatively), “也” (also), “与其...不如...” (rather than), “比起...来” (compared to), and some adverbs like “更” (more) and quantity words like “些” or “点” (some, a bit) that attach to adjectives can also be considered comparatives (Xu Guoping, 2007: 29-37).

This paper examines the Chinese sources of “better” and “further” in the 20th National Congress Report translation. Since these two comparative words express quantitative differences between two things, we focus on Chinese comparative structures that similarly express quantitative changes between two things. Accordingly, we identify the main Chinese comparative structures as “...比...” (than), “越...越...” (the more...the more), “比较” (relatively), “与其...不如...” (rather than), “比起...来” (compared to), “更” (more), and quantity words like “些” or “点” (some, a bit) that clearly express changes or quantitative differences between things.

2. SOURCE ANALYSIS OF “BETTER” AND “FURTHER”

In the English translation of Report to the 20th CPC National Congress, “better” appears 49 times. While “better” is a typical comparative word, only 14 instances in the corresponding Chinese text have clear comparative markers, while the remaining 35 do not. Therefore, 71% of the Chinese source text corresponding to “better” lacks comparative markers.

Additionally, “further” appears 20 times in the translation. Only 3 instances in the Chinese source text have clear comparative markers, while 17 do not. Thus, 85% of the Chinese source text corresponding to “further” lacks comparative markers, as shown in Tables 1 and 2.

Table 1: Sources of “Better” in Original Text and Proportions

Original text corresponding to “better”	Number (Total 40)	Percentage of all “better” correspondences
Positive form	35	71%
Comparative form	14	29%

Table 2: Sources of “Further” in Original Text and Proportions

Original text corresponding to “further”	Number (Total 20)	Percentage of all “further” correspondences
Positive form	17	85%
Comparative form	3	15%

These data prove that many comparative structures in English translations come from positive structures in Chinese source texts. In other words, the translated text’s meaning implies and often exceeds the original text’s meaning.

Wang Jianguo and Xie Fei (2020) use coordinate methods to represent the relationship between front and back ends, more vividly indicating common Chinese-English and English-Chinese translation methods: If the original meaning is marked as N, Chinese-English translation methods generally appear as N+1, meaning the translated text jumps to the back end of the original text’s event content. Conversely, English-Chinese translation generally appears as N-1, meaning the translated text jumps to the front end of the original text’s event content. Roughly speaking, N represents traditional “literal translation,” while N+1 and N-1 represent specific “free translation” methods in Chinese-English and English-Chinese translation respectively.

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Thus, the situations reflected in Tables 1 and 2 are explained: “better” and “further” come from Chinese positive adjectives or adverbs because Chinese-English translation often needs to adopt the N+1 translation method.

Let’s analyze specific source types for “better” and “further.”

2.1 Corresponding to Chinese Positive Forms

As mentioned earlier, Chinese-English translation often needs to adopt the N+1 method. This means that from an overall meaning perspective, English translations contain greater semantic content than Chinese originals, specifically manifested in translation word choices tending toward more result-oriented meanings. In the 20th National Congress Report, many Chinese positive words are translated as “better” and “further.” These two English words are typical comparative words, containing more advanced meanings compared to positive forms.

In the entire report’s translation, “better” appears 49 times, with 35 instances corresponding to original text without comparative markers. The specific positive form sources are shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Distribution of Chinese Positive Forms Translated as “Better”

Original Chinese positive form	Number (Total 49, excluding 14 comparative forms)	Percentage
优 (excellent)	11	31%
加强 (strengthen)	10	29%
提高 (improve)	4	11%
美好 (good/beautiful)	3	9%
强化 (reinforce)	3	9%
增强 (enhance)	2	6%
No clear corresponding text	1	3%
日益增长 (growing)	1	3%
Total	35	100%

For example:

Example 1: The Chinese text states “明确我国社会主要矛盾是人民日益增长的美好生活需要和不平衡不充分的发展之间的矛盾” (The main contradiction in our society is between the people’s growing needs for a good life and unbalanced and inadequate development).

Translation: “We have identified the principal contradiction facing Chinese society as that between unbalanced and inadequate development and the people’s ever-growing needs for a better life.”

Example 2: The Chinese text states “党的政治领导力、思想引领力、群众组织力、社会号召力显著增强” (The Party’s political leadership, ideological guidance, mass organization, and social appeal have significantly strengthened).

Translation: “It has grown better at providing political leadership, giving theoretical guidance, organizing the people, and inspiring society.”

In Example 1, the Chinese phrase “美好生活” (good life) would typically be translated as “happy life” or “good life.” However, in

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the translation, it becomes “better life.” In fact, all four instances of “美好生活” in the original text are consistently translated as “better life.”

The Chinese phrase “美好生活” is a broad category that might mean different things to different social groups, which aligns with Chinese language’s tendency toward ambiguity. The translation’s use of “better” implies a life that is “better than before.” While the Chinese “美好” and the English “better” are semantically close, “better life” adds an additional layer of meaning beyond “美好生活.” Its semantic scope advances one step beyond the original text - in other words, if “美好” is N, “better” is N+1. Compared to the original “美好,” “better” expresses the event’s end state. This treatment naturally leads English readers to compare with previous living conditions, making the concept of “美好生活” clearer and more concrete. It also highlights how English tends to express the end state of events while Chinese expresses the beginning state.

In Example 2, the translator chose to use the comparative word “better” to express the Chinese positive form “增强”¹. The original phrase “显著增强” (significantly enhanced) becomes “It has grown better at,” meaning “more skilled at.” The phrase “more skilled at” might lead readers to infer that the previous service capability was likely “poor” and thus needed enhancement. However, “显著增强” typically means “good becoming even better,” implying “continued enhancement” on an already strong foundation. Evidently, the translation’s semantic implications add a qualitative judgment after “enhancement,” advancing one step beyond the original text’s meaning. In other words, if the original text is N, the translation through this treatment becomes N+1.

Let’s look at the data for “further” corresponding to positive forms in the original text, as shown in Table 4.

Table 4: Distribution of Chinese Positive Forms Translated as “Further”

Original Chinese positive form	Number (Total 20, excluding 3 comparative forms)	Percentage
深入 (deep/thorough)	4	24%
No clear corresponding text	4	24%
深化 (deepen)	3	18%
深度 (depth)	2	12%
加强 (strengthen)	2	12%
进一步 (further)	1	6%
提高 (improve)	1	6%
Total	17	100%

For example:

Example 3: The Chinese text states “中国特色社会主义制度更加成熟更加定型，国家治理体系和治理能力现代化水平明显提高” (The system of socialism with Chinese characteristics has become more mature and well-defined, and the modernization level of the national governance system and capacity has notably improved).

Translation: “The system of socialism with Chinese characteristics has become more mature and well-defined, and China’s system and capacity for governance have been further modernized.”

¹ Words like “加强” (strengthen) inherently contain a comparative meaning. However, these words can take Chinese comparative markers like “更(加)” (more) before them. In contrast, phrases like “更美好” (better), which are already considered Chinese comparatives, cannot take “更” to become “更更美好” (more better). This is why words like “加强” correspond to “better” but are not considered as corresponding to English comparative forms in translation.

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Example 4: The Chinese text states “构建优质高效的服务业新体系, 推动现代服务业同先进制造业、现代农业深度融合” (Build a new system of high-quality and efficient services, and promote deep integration of modern services with advanced manufacturing and modern agriculture).

Translation: “We will build a new system of efficient and high-quality services and promote further integration of modern services with advanced manufacturing and modern agriculture.”

In Example 3, the Chinese phrase “明显提高” (notably improved) corresponds to the word “further” in the translation. Forming the phrase “further modernized,” its literal meaning can be translated as “modernize one step further (N+1).” This meaning pushes one step beyond the original text’s “modernization... improved,” confirming our earlier conclusion that the word choice in the translation advances beyond the original text.

Similarly, in Example 4, the Chinese word “深度” (deep) corresponds to “further” in the translation. The phrase “further integration” literally means “deeper-level integration” or “one-step-further integration.” Compared with the original “deep integration,” it expresses a degree of meaning that adds another layer on top of the original text’s foundation. In other words, the meaning in the English translation advances beyond that of the original text.

2.2 No Corresponding Chinese Positive Forms

In the original Chinese text of the 20th National Congress Report, there are three sentences that have neither clear comparative markers nor positive words corresponding to comparative meanings, yet their translations use “better.” For example:

Example 5: The Chinese text states “引导规范民办教育发展” (Guide and regulate the development of private education).

Translation: “We will better guide and regulate the development of private schools.”

Example 6: The Chinese text states “围绕举旗帜、聚民心、育新人、兴文化、展形象建设社会主义文化强国, 发展面向现代化、面向世界、面向未来的, 民族的科学的大众的社会主义文化” (Build a socialist cultural powerhouse by focusing on raising banners, gathering people’s hearts, nurturing new people, developing culture, and presenting our image, developing socialist culture that is national, scientific, and popular, oriented toward modernization, the world, and the future).

Translation: “In our efforts to turn China into a country with a strong socialist culture, we will focus on upholding socialism with Chinese characteristics, rallying public support, fostering a new generation of young people, developing Chinese culture, and better presenting China to the world.”

Similarly, in the original Chinese text, there are three instances where “further” in the translation has no corresponding Chinese text, whether in positive or comparative form. For example:

Example 7: “在社会基层坚持和发展新时代‘枫桥经验’, 完善正确处理新形势下人民内部矛盾机制” (At the grassroots level of society, maintain and develop the “Fengqiao Experience” of the new era, and improve the mechanism for properly handling contradictions among the people under new circumstances).

Translation: “We will apply and further develop the ‘Fengqiao model’ for promoting community-level governance in the new era, and we will improve the mechanisms for appropriately addressing disputes between members of the public under the new circumstances.”

Example 8: The Chinese text states “构建优质高效的服务业新体系, 推动现代服务业同先进制造业、现代农业深度融合” (Build a new system of efficient and high-quality services, and promote deep integration of modern services with advanced manufacturing and modern agriculture).

Translation: “We will build a new system of efficient and high-quality services and promote further integration of modern services with advanced manufacturing and modern agriculture.”

In Examples 5 through 8, the original Chinese text contains neither comparative markers nor words semantically similar to “better”

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and “further.” However, the translator still chose to use these comparative words in the translation. This means the translation added certain marker words to highlight focal information, which serves as a compression strategy. After this treatment, from a content perspective, the translations of Examples 5 and 6 add an additional layer of meaning of “better” compared to the original text. The translations of Examples 7 and 8 add an additional layer of meaning of “further” or “deeper level.” For instance, in Example 5, “引导规范” (guide and regulate) becomes “better guide and regulate.” We can see that although the Chinese original text already expresses a result state, the translation pushes this meaning one step further beyond the original result state. Examples 6 through 8 follow the same pattern as Example 5, with identical treatment and effects. After adding comparative markers, all translations push the semantic implications one step further beyond what the original text expresses. In other words, the resultative meaning in the translations all exceeds the resultative meaning expressed in the original text. This aligns with Wang Jianguo’s proposed N+1 Chinese-English translation strategy.

3. REVERSE VALIDATION THROUGH ENGLISH-CHINESE TRANSLATION ANALYSIS

We have deduced that the N+1 translation strategy is indeed applicable in Chinese-English translation. Does the N-1 English-Chinese translation strategy (Wang Jianguo 2020) hold true in reverse?

3.1 Data Findings

Through searching the tr-corpus.com corpus, we found that in English-to-Chinese translation, in most cases, when the English original text uses comparative forms, the Chinese translation also maintains comparative forms. While some English comparatives are indeed translated into Chinese positive forms, the proportion is relatively small. Compared to Chinese-to-English translation, where Chinese positive forms become English comparatives, this proportion is much lower.

Research shows that among 500 English-to-Chinese sentences containing “better,” 407 translations maintained comparative markers in Chinese, while 93 translations used positive forms without comparative markers. The situation with “further” is similar. Among 500 sentences containing “further,” 380 translations used comparative forms, while 120 used positive forms, far fewer than those using comparative forms. The specific data is shown in Table 5:

Table 5: Translation Forms for “Better” and “Further”

Original translation	“better” Number (Total 500)	Percentage	Original translation	“further” Number (Total 500)	Percentage
Comparative form	407	81%	Comparative form	380	76%
Positive form	93	19%	Positive form	120	24%

3.2 Analysis of Data Causation

Looking at the data, first, English-Chinese translation doesn’t show the N+1 pattern of Chinese-English translation, nor does Chinese-English translation show the N-1 pattern of English-Chinese translation. This reflects the directional differences between English-Chinese and Chinese-English translation.

Second, the N-1 cases in English-Chinese translation are around 20%, much lower than the approximately 80% N+1 cases in Chinese-English translation. Why does such a large proportion difference exist? We believe there are two reasons:

First, searching the corpus reveals that in English-to-Chinese translation, if comparative words in the original text are not converted to positive forms in Chinese translation but remain as comparatives, the translations often sound unnatural or are not the best or necessary choices. The existence of these translations also increases the proportion difference between N+1 in Chinese-English translation and N-1 in English-Chinese translation. For example (the following examples are from the corpus):

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Example 9: Original: “Will it nurture my passion to build a better world?”

Translation: “这所大学将会培养我建设更美好世界的热情吗？”

Revised Translation 1: “有了这所大学的培养，我就会有热情把世界建设得更美好吗？”

Revised Translation 2: “有了这所大学的培养，我就会有热情把世界建设好吗？”

Example 10: Original: “As the information explosion in China makes people more sophisticated, they demand more choice as well as better quality and value.”

Translation: “随着中国进入信息爆炸的时代，人们变得越来越见多识广，他们要求的不仅有更多选择，还要求更好的质量和价值。”

Revised Translation: “当前，中国进入信息爆炸时代，人们看得多，听得多。他们不仅要求选择多，还要求质量高，价值高。”

Second, in English-Chinese translation at the word level, if corresponding translation is possible, such as converting English comparative words into corresponding Chinese comparatives, besides appearing more faithful in form, the translation’s meaning also more easily aligns with logic. This is because Chinese traditional thinking emphasizes practical experience and holistic thinking, thus relying on intuitive understanding; Western thinking traditions emphasize science and rationality, focusing on analysis and empirical evidence, thus necessarily relying on logic (Lian Shuneng 2002). In other words, English has stronger logic, while Chinese is more subjective.

The above reasons also highlight that if Chinese-English translation adopts corresponding positive word translation, logical problems may arise. For example, these examples from the 20th National Congress Report:

Example 11: Chinese text: “香港局势实现由乱到治的重大转折” (Hong Kong’s situation has achieved a major transformation from chaos to order).

Translation: “Thanks to these moves, order has been restored in Hong Kong, marking a major turn for the better in the region.”

Example 12: Chinese text: “我们坚持把实现人民对美好生活的向往作为现代化建设的出发点和落脚点” (We persist in making the realization of people’s yearning for a good life the starting point and goal of modernization construction).

Translation: “The immutable goal of our modernization drive is to meet the people’s aspirations for a better life.”

In Example 11, the Chinese phrase “重大转折” is translated as “a major turn for the better” using the comparative form. This treatment aligns with both English expression habits and logic in terms of both meaning and form. However, if we were to use the positive form instead of the comparative, the translation of Example 11 might imply that there was no order previously, and Example 12’s translation might suggest that people’s lives were not good before. Such implications would contradict factual logic.

The same principle applies to translations using “further.” For example:

Example 13: The Chinese text states “改革开放迈出新步伐，国家治理体系和治理能力现代化深入推进” (Reform and opening up makes new strides, modernization of national governance system and capacity advances deeply).

Translation: “Make new strides in reform and opening up; make further progress in modernizing China’s system and capacity for governance.”

Example 14: The Chinese text states “加快发展数字经济，促进数字经济和实体经济深度融合，打造具有国际竞争力的数字产业集群” (Accelerate the development of digital economy, promote deep integration of digital economy and real economy, and build internationally competitive digital industry clusters).

Translation: “We will accelerate the development of the digital economy, further integrate it with the real economy, and build internationally competitive digital industry clusters.”

In Examples 13 and 14, if the comparative word “further” were not used, the translations would imply that there was no foundation

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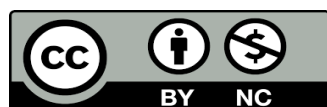
previously - which would similarly contradict factual logic.

4. CONCLUSION

This paper’s examination of the use of “better” and “further” in the 20th National Congress Report provides at least the following insights: (1) Chinese-English pragmatic differences affect both Chinese-English and English-Chinese translation, with translation methods in both directions showing inverse orientations, but due to English’s stronger logic, English-Chinese translation is less affected. (2) In Chinese-English translation, the translated meaning tends to advance beyond the original meaning, thus emphasizing result meaning, while in English-Chinese translation, for fluency, the translated meaning tends to step back from the original meaning, thus emphasizing process meaning.

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