Study on English Translation of Chinese Quantifiers from the Perspective of Cognitive Iconicity: A Pilot Study

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Abstract: Chinese quantifiers are heavily loaded with Chinese culture, making it challenging to translate them into idiomatic English. The majority of earlier studies only examined linguistically the English translations of Chinese quantifiers. The interpretation of linguistic information, however, is a developing and pivotal stage of cognition in the translation process. Under the umbrella of cognitive iconicity, the research of cognitive distance between linguistic forms is being conducted. Therefore, it makes sense to talk about cognitive iconicity while discussing the English translation of Chinese nominal quantifiers. Based on the definition as well as the function of Chinese quantifiers, this research summarized four translation methods from a viewpoint of individual nominal quantifiers, namely, the omission of iconicity, the retention of iconicity, the conversion of iconicity, and the addition of iconicity. And then it further discussed the selection process of English translation version of Chinese nominal quantifiers.

1. Introduction

Nouns and quantifiers are not haphazardly grouped together in Chinese. Every quantifier has a distinct cultural base, which develops into a distinct cognitive form over time. This interlanguage mismatch and the cognitive differences resulting from the social and cultural distance make translating Chinese quantifiers into English a difficult task. Due to the large number of linguistic cases when Chinese and English quantifiers are truly not equal, it is challenging to comprehend the equivalency of English-Chinese quantifiers even with standard translation skills. Fortunately, cognitive linguistic research provides a fresh angle on the study of Chinese-English quantifier translation by focusing on the relationship between language structure and people's subjective perceptions of the environment. From the perspective of cognition, a new line of investigation into the phenomenon of non-equivalence between the English and Chinese languages is presented.

1.1. The nature of Chinese quantifiers and their functions

The nature of word classes is often explored by modern linguistics from their functions. It is now easier to ascertain the usage and evolution pattern of quantifiers due to their syntactic role. Quantifiers have the characteristics of light nouns based on their syntactic distribution, but their syntactic role is to mark countable nouns [1]. However, it is always misleading to consider quantifiers as nouns that denote “quantity”. Different quantifiers in Chinese has diverse temperaments. This indicates that there is a particular inclination to choose the proper collocations of Chinese quantifiers. For instance, Chinese quantifiers, such as “一尊大佛” and “一座雕塑” can’t be used as alternations (“一尊” and “一座” are both Chinese numeral quantifiers which refers to the quantity of one).

Thus, Chinese quantifiers are not only for quantity. They also classify nouns after them. Classifiers are divided into seven categories, including material, shape, and quantum, based on the link between the classifier and the word it modifies [2]. Chinese quantifiers are therefore better suited to be categorized as classifiers. This study elucidates that the function of a quantifier is contingent upon the word it represents, as each quantifier possesses the dual attributes of "classification" and "measurement." Because the function of a quantifier depends on the relationship between the noun it represents and the noun it modifies, quantifiers that have the same function as those mentioned above will have temperaments that vary from one another.

1.2. Difficulties in English translation of Chinese quantifiers

The first study on the semantics of quantifiers was carried out by Van Benthem J. in 1986[3]. He asserted that there must have been several logical interactions between generalized quantifiers and high-level ordered quantifiers, where quantifiers have a semantic scope. However, the
logic interactions within English quantifier phrases are different from those between quantifiers and nouns in Chinese [4]. Thus, it is difficult to distinguish between the domains that correspond to Chinese and English quantifiers. Moreover, Chinese quantifiers are distinct from other Chinese words in that they convey both categorical and quantitative information. And this makes it more difficult to translate Chinese quantifiers to English counterparts.

As cognitive linguistics has gained popularity, many linguists have started to reevaluate how Chinese quantifiers are translated into English from a cognitive standpoint. Domestically, the study on English translation of Chinese quantifiers has increased dramatically since Chinese scholar Zeng Zili examined it from the standpoint of “the art of selection” [5]. According to Guo Rui, the so-called categorization function of individual quantifiers is based on the unique selective relationship between individual quantifiers and nouns [6]. This study is significant as it helps to choose English translation of Chinese quantifiers. But it fails to clarify the cognitive basis on the relationship between Chinese quantifiers and the nominal words whereafter. Based on the ideas, tenets, and techniques of cognitive linguistics, translators seek to investigate the various phenomena of translation and deal with difficulties in the translation process. Jia Guangmao observed that the technique of constructing conceptual reference points can explain the phenomena of quantifier domain ambiguity in English and Chinese through comparative examination of the two languages [7]. This offers a fresh viewpoint on the reciprocal translation of English-Chinese quantifiers and further enhances the comparative study of English-Chinese quantifiers.

However, the cognitive explanations for the methodological research on the English translation of Chinese quantifiers are still insufficient to clarify the complexity of Chinese quantifiers and the disparity in quantifier usage between Chinese and English. Therefore, this paper examines the feasibility of the iconicity theory for the English translation of Chinese quantifiers along with several relationships between linguistic quantifier concordance and cognitive iconic organization in the translation process. The research questions are as follows:

1. What is iconic mechanism between the quantifier and the noun it modified?
2. How to make idiomatic English translation for Chinese quantifiers?

### 2. Iconicity theory on the English translation of Chinese quantifiers

The use of quantifiers in different languages has some commonality, which provides the possibility of translating quantifiers between languages. Specifically, Chinese and English quantifiers have the same function of quant and have both undergone the abstraction to concreteness transition. People with diverse cognitive backgrounds make distinct links between quantifiers and the modified nouns, which is called the iconicity of language. By examining quantifier-noun collocations in Chinese, it was discovered that the connection between a noun and the other noun that its quantifier signified in the objective world was what the linguistic relationship between nouns and quantifiers alluded to [8]. According to Pang Xuefeng, translation practice, which is the process of language decoding and recoding, consists of both intrinsic and extrinsic elements [9]. The extrinsic level is manifested in the restricting and building of language form, while its intrinsic dimension is the cognitive dimension of translation [10]. In addition, the 22nd National Psychological Academic Conference stated that “Chinese quantifiers also have their special cognitive meanings, which are paired with specific categories and have the function of categorization, and the use of quantifiers can make the things they are paired with more concrete images” [11]. This enhanced the feasibility to construct the quantifier-noun relationship from the cognition level.

One of the key tenets of cognitive linguistics is the concept of iconicity, which is not only the fundamental element of linguistic organization but also one of the core principles of translation category conversion [12]. Previous studies have examined the relationship between quantifier jurisdiction and syntactic structure [4][13][14][15]. Gelman, S. A.et al. found that children's construction of quantifiers is from generalized quantifiers to high-level quantifiers [16]. It suggests that people's ability to subdivide quantifiers grows as their exposure to the outside world increases. It also offers a factual foundation for the iconicity interpretation of quantifier translations into English. Zhao Xingbai & Lu Jingjing discussed the mechanism of equivalence in translation practice from a viewpoint of iconicity, and analyzed the three most basic iconic relations in translation equivalence in terms of form, relation, and meaning [17].

Due to the difference in the iconic cognition in the collocation of quantifiers and nouns in different languages, the English translation of Chinese quantifiers, on the one hand, is exceptionally difficult, but on the other, the idea of the English translation of Chinese quantifiers is made clearer. Frog by Mo Yan makes extensive use of grounded Chinese quantifiers, and Ge Haowen's English translation of the piece is well recognized. In order to outline the strategies for a more idiomatic English translation of Chinese quantifiers, the study contrasted the quantifier gaps between the original text and the English translation based on samples from Frog.

### 3.A Comparative Analysis of English Translations of Chinese Nominal Quantifiers

English nouns can be divided into countable and uncountable nouns, whereas Chinese nouns do not have number variants. In Chinese, uncountable nouns also use quantifiers. Additionally, Chinese employ different quantifiers as measurement of an item with same quantity to symbolize their specific shape or other characteristics. The unequal distribution of quantifiers in English and Chinese as well as differences in the cognitive thinking embedded in the two languages led to this linguistic difference. There is iconic relationship between quantifiers and the nouns they modified, which is involved...
cultural identification. Thus, it is essential to retain, convert, omit or add iconic rhetorical in English translation. These phenomena are discussed in the following lines.

3.1. Omission of iconic relationship in the translation

In English, countable nouns often have a distinct referent, one that incorporates the idea of “quantity” and is semantically self-sufficient in the measurement category. Different from English, quantifier in Chinese is not only for quantity but also for classification by iconic relationship in the material world. However, the relationship between a Chinese quantifier and a noun is frequently lost in English translations, primarily as a result of the use of articles or plural noun forms in place of articles or number + noun singular, then it is recommended to omit the iconic relationship the quantifier in “a string of grapes” stimulates the shape of a “string of”, “a strip of” etc. Therefore, the quantifier that alters uncountable nouns in Chinese usually possesses a metonymic iconicity. This is a Chinese author’s linguistic trait. In order to preserve solely the quantitative aspects during the translation process, Ge Haowen decided to eliminate the iconic relationship. This communicates the original text's actual meaning based on the specifics of the context.

Similarly, there is “两行泪” in Chinese, “两行” imitates the shape of tears across the cheeks, which belongs to analogical resemblance. The translation used by Ge Haowen is “Strings of tears”, which captures the analogous iconicity and conveys the feeling of tears streaming from the eyes. The translation idiomatically and vividly reflects iconic relationship between the noun the quantifier represents and the noun it modified can be replaced by a article or plural forms.

3.2. Retainment of iconic relationship in the translation

Although, English is concrete, and some quantifiers in Chinese are easy to found their counterparts in English. For example, the Chinese quantifier for weight, “一斤肉”, can be translated into English as “a kilo meat”. Another example is “麦子八毛钱一斤”, The translator translates the sentence as “Wheat sells for eighty cents a jin”. Thus, sometimes, we’d better to retain the iconic relationship. (3) "一盘绳子"

The quantifier in Chinese “一盘” is an analogy for the shape of a “rope”. To retain this image and keep the iconicity between the quantifier and the noun it signified in the English translation, it is necessary to find the equivalent quantifier in English for the shape of a rope. Therefore, the translator selects “coil”. “coil” refers to a series of circles formed by winding up a length of rope, wire, etc. (Oxford Dictionary). Another example is “一块肥皂”, which is rendered to “a cake of soap” to retain the shape of soap (a soup in China looks like a cake). Similarly, there is “两行泪” in Chinese, “两行” imitates the shape of tears across the cheeks, which belongs to analogical resemblance. The translation used by Ge Haowen is “Strings of tears”, which captures the analogous iconicity and conveys the feeling of tears streaming from the eyes. The translation idiomatically and vividly reflects iconic relationship between the noun the quantifier represents and the noun it modified.

Furthermore, the quantifier that alters uncountable nouns in Chinese usually possesses a metonymic iconicity. Many metonymically iconic quantifiers that serve as containers for the nouns they modify are found in both Chinese and English. Translating these quantifiers frequently keeps the iconic link intact. Examine the example provided below.

(4) "一杯水(《蛙》)"

In this case, “glass” is the container for “water”, which is expressed in English by the analogous relation of one little word. Similar example, like “两具尸体” was rendered to “two corps” rather than “two equipment of corps”. This is because “equipment” in English refers to things that are need for particular purpose. English speakers and Chinese speakers perceive images very differently. As a result, the iconic relationship sometimes had to end. A shift from the surface level to the cognitive level serves as a helpful reminder to translators that in certain situations, it is necessary to ignore the iconic relationship between the quantifier and the noun it modified in order to maintain readability and idiomaticity.

In a word, Chinese is more abstract than Chinese. This is particular a case when the quantifier used. Almost every Chinese quantifier has an iconic relationship with the noun it modified. But when the main function of the quantifier is the function of quantity, the iconicity between the noun the quantifier represented and the noun it modified can be replaced by a article or plural forms.
reciprocity. Similarly, “一桌子菜” is translated as “a table of dishes”, and “一罐奶粉” is translated as “a can of milk powder”, “一把石灰” is translated as “a handful of roadside lime” and so on.

Furthermore, abstract nouns in Chinese are often constructed by associating with quantifiers. English emphasizes rational thinking and the extension of things, so the quantifiers constructed by association are very rich. Therefore, when dealing with this kind of Chinese quantifiers, the associative iconicity can be retained, such as “a ray of sunshine”, “a wisp of cloud”, “a glimmer of hope”, and so on.

3.3. Conversion of iconic relationship in translation

The iconic relationship between the noun represented by a Chinese quantifier and the noun it modifies is not always equivalent in translation. Analogical iconicity and metonymic iconicity are more widespread in Chinese than in English, while associative resemblance is more common in English. Therefore, when translating from Chinese to English, the iconic relationship between the noun represented by the quantifier and the noun it modifies can be converted appropriately.

(5)一拱
Translation: a humpback bridge

The quantifier “一拱” in the original text is a characteristic of the shape of a bridge. The translation keeps this characteristic and chooses “humpback”, which is interpreted as “a large whale with a curved back (Oxford)” in English. From the bridge to the humpback whale, the imagery is characterized by a large, arched back, so the imagery of the original text is retained.

The discussions above have focused on countable nouns and uncountable nouns with objective entities, however, there are also a large number of abstract nouns in English and Chinese, the semantics of abstract nouns implies the fusion and dovetailing of objective reality, thought and cognition [18]. These kinds of nouns are also the focus of discussion in metaphorical cognition. And it has been found that it often relies on people's objective experience to choose more concrete and figurative quantifiers. The following is a discussion on the English translation of the quantifiers of this part of nouns.

(6)生活很艰难，但还有一点希望
Translation: The life is difficult, but there is still a ray of hope

The quantifier “一点” in the original text indicates that life is too difficult with a slim hope. But the writer here mainly expressed positive emotions. Therefore, the translation associates it with sunlight and light, and it is more appropriate to use “a ray” to modify “hope” than to choose the corresponding word “a little” directly. Here is another example:

3.4. Addition of iconic relationship

Firstly, there are a lot of abstract nouns in Chinese that have both noun and adjective properties, such as “骄傲” (proudness), “热闹(hilarity)”, “友谊(friendship)”, “失望(disappointment)” and so on. Chinese quantifiers are occasionally disregarded in favor of adjectives and adverbs since the language is delicate in describing the number of lovely things. In order to convey the “quantity” of something in an English translation, the quantifier must be inserted. The translator must then decide on the iconic relationship between the noun represented by the quantifier and the modified word. The following are some examples.

(7)当我们把筏子抬出去时，河堤上已经热闹非凡。
(《蛙》)
Translation: The riverbank was a flurry of activity by the time we reached it with our raft. (Ge Haowen)

“热闹非凡” in the original language means that the riverbanks become rich in activity. The definition of “flurry” in the online Oxford Dictionary is: an occasion when there is a lot of activity, interest, excitement, etc. within a short period of time. It is more precise and vivid to give analogical iconicity to the translation of activity in order to convey the colorfulness or the richness of the activities on the coast.

(8)理是这么个理，可是一想，这么点点辣水，凭什么值那么多钱？(《蛙》)
Translation: I understand what you’re saying, my father said, but I ask you, can a bottle of peppery liquor really be worth that much money? (Ge Haowen)

In the original text, the quantifier “点点” conveys the meaning of “a small amount”. And when read in the context, it is clear that this means the idea that a bottle of wine is too expensive. To avoid ambiguity in the translation, Ge Haowen added a metaphorical iconic relationship to materialize “amount”.

Second, English has a large number of nouns, and the situations in which they take the role of quantifiers are intricate. For instance, there are many different ways to express the idea of “crowds”. For example, in the translation of “一群 人”, including “a crowd of people”, which only conveys the number of people, “a multitude of people”, which means “a large crowd” as an enhancement on the number, “a throng of people”, which not only emphasizes the “crowdedness” of the crowd but also the state of the people, and “a gang of people” is “a group of undesirables”. Therefore, when translating Chinese quantifiers into English, translators must precisely understand both the positive and negative connotations of the phrases. This requires a high level of Chinese literacy as well as close observation on the part of the translator.

4. Subjectivity Choices in English Translation of Chinese Quantifiers

The use of quantifiers is crucial in both Chinese and English. Without quantifiers, the number of a noun may be taken to suggest that there aren't enough pounds, and the shape of its objective entity could change while its meaning would be greatly weakened. To be specifically, the quantifier “一蓑” in the phrase “一蓑烟雨任平生” is more for conveying a mood than for a precise comprehension of the quantity. At this point, if we simply
translate the quantifier as “a rush of smoke and rain”, the spirit is lost although the grammar is valid. Choosing not to use the quantifiers at all at this point would be much preferable. In this way, the translation that “by misty rain no matter what always settles”, expresses the feeling of misty rain and smoke vividly. Therefore, the English translation of Chinese quantifiers reflects a process of selection. The questions of “to translate or not to translate”, “how to translate” and “to translate into what” are always unavoidable, and the translator’s subjectivity is reflected in this process. The principle of iconicity can provide a cognitive explanation for the English translation of Chinese quantifiers, which in turn proves that there is a cognitive distance between the decoding and reconstruction of languages.

5. Conclusions

The retention, conversion, omission and addition of an iconic relationship are found to be the four types of iconicity justifications in the process of translating Chinese quantifiers into English in the current study. To make an idiomatic English translation, it is important to have a grasp of the iconic relationship between quantifiers and the nouns they modified. Therefore, as a pilot study, it not only rationalizes the cognitive justifications for the research on the English translation of Chinese quantifiers but also directs the translation practice. To be specifically, the retention and addition of an iconic relationship between the quantifier and the noun it modified help disseminate Chinese culture. And the omission and conversion of it is really helpful in dealing with culture shock sometimes. The application of cognitive perspective on translation will enlighten translators to rethink the nature of translation so that to build a consolidated culture bridge between Chinese and English. However, the use of Chinese nominal quantifiers is very complicated, and this paper does not discuss the translation of compound quantifiers and overlapping quantifiers, which entails further studies. In addition, the transformations of similarity relations between quantifiers and nouns are numerous and complex, which need to be discussed in depth in more studies. In a word, modern linguistics inquires translators irrigate themselves with both depth in more studies. In a word, modern linguistics

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