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Lost and added in translation:

A corpus-based study on Chinese numeral classifiers in the translation between Chinese and English

Abstract (English)

This dissertation aims at a corpus-based analysis of Chinese numeral classifiers, elements occurring between numerals or demonstratives and nouns, in the translation between Mandarin Chinese and English. While Chinese numeral classifiers have received substantial attention in recent decades, relatively little research has been done on their semantic contribution based on corpus data and their representation in English translation, particularly regarding their functionality. In this study I show how Chinese numeral classifiers and other elements of the noun phrase contribute to its semantics and how they correspond to equivalent elements in English translation based on their semantic and discourse functions. Both quantitative and qualitative studies were conducted to address the above issues based on three self-compiled specialized Chinese-English parallel corpora with 6700 pairs of Chinese-English numeral noun phrases without adjectives, 523 pairs of Chinese-English numeral noun phrases with adjectives, and 645 pairs of noun phrases derived from five chapters of the novel *The Three-Body Problem* by Liu Cixin, respectively.

Based on the frequency and collocations of Chinese numeral classifiers, this study shows that different types of classifiers are used in a complementary way and can be ordered in terms of different degrees on the individuation hierarchy. I also show that numeral classifiers contribute additional meanings related to quality and quantity to noun phrases, other than denoting semantic features of noun referents. Moreover, I demonstrate that classifiers can be referential to different degrees based on how fixed they are in collocations with nouns, and the meaning of a classifier phrase is a product of its constituent parts.

With regard to the translation of Chinese numeral classifiers, the study shows that to express equivalent meanings, English uses such means as measure words, the plural form, articles and demonstratives, nouns and pronouns. The study demonstrates that the semantic functions of Chinese numeral classifiers are rarely reflected in English translation. For example, the function involving individuation of nouns is only reflected in English in a limited number of measure words used with uncountable nouns or the plural form marked on countable nouns. The semantic functions concerning differentiating referents and ascribing properties to referents are only reflected in English translation in some measure words and nouns. The study also

shows that compared with their semantic functions, discourse functions of Chinese numeral classifiers are more likely to be reflected in English translation. English articles and demonstratives can be used to express definiteness and referentiality related to the function of reference management, while nouns and pronouns can be also used to represent the functions related to reference management as well as reference identification and re-presentation of referents.

These findings contribute to a better theoretical and empirical understanding of Chinese numeral classifiers. This study demonstrates that general classifiers are used as default classifiers to categorize referents in terms of humanness and animacy, while specific classifiers are used to denote specific features of referents. In addition, this study illustrates that the general classifier *gè* is used to replace specific classifiers in subsequent mentions of a referent (reference management), while specific classifiers are used to track referents anaphorically and to disambiguate among previously mentioned referents. The results demonstrate the different degrees of grammaticalization of general and specific classifiers, and thus contribute to the typology of nominal classification in general. Furthermore, the study demonstrates the effect of the presence of numeral classifiers on the choice of nouns and adjectives and on the interpretation of the numeral *yī* 'one' as a marker of indefiniteness. While numeral classifiers are semantically correlated with nouns, there are two-way restrictions on the choice of numeral classifiers and adjectives. Numeral classifiers also coerce an indefinite reading of numerals. These results inform empirical studies on the cognitive mechanisms of language processing in relation to discourse functions of classifiers in Chinese, or more generally, classifier languages. Finally, I also demonstrate the different forms used in English translation to express meanings of Chinese numeral classifiers and their functions. Such contrastive analyses shed new light on the acquisition of Chinese numeral classifiers and equivalent forms in English by speakers of both non-classifier and classifier languages.