

Enhanced Phraseological Idiomaticity in Chinese Translational Texts: A Corpus-Based Study of Chinese Four-Character Idioms in Translational and Non-Translational Literal Texts

Meng Ji¹

Abstract

The aim of a corpus-based approach to the study of Chinese idioms in translational and non-translational texts is to testify the preliminary hypothesis regarding the remarkable use of typical four-character expressions, especially idioms and collocations in Chinese translational texts, which has been conceived and developed largely from my Ph.D. dissertation on a corpus-based study of four-character idiomatic expressions (FCEXs) in two contemporary Chinese versions of Cervantes' *Don Quijote*. It has been shown in a previous comparative study of the Chinese sub-corpus texts of CSCHDQ, a parallel corpus of *Don Quijote* and its two Chinese versions, which has been built by the researcher herself to complete her Ph.D. study, and the referential corpora Lancaster Corpus of Modern Chinese (LCMC) that the use of FCEXs in the Chinese translational texts is remarkably more important than in non-translational texts: while the ratios of FCEXs to word types in Liu's and Yang's translations of *Don Quijote* are 5.93 and 3.99 per cent respectively; the relevant figure in LCMC only represents some 2.75 per cent. This is a very interesting and revealing finding in relation to a core notion in doing Translation Studies, i.e. the originality of the target language. It is assumed that the corroboration and substantiation of such a promising hypothesis with quantitative corpus information regarding the enhanced phraseological idiomaticity of the Chinese target language would alter considerably the traditional view of seeing translational texts as invariably lacking of creativity and independence from the source texts as exemplified by the common use of terms like normalization, explicitation or simplification in describing translational works in the literature. For the purpose of the current study, two comparative corpora have been constructed which are Chinese Chronological Translational Corpora (CCTC) and its counterpart Chinese Chronological Non-Translational Corpora (CCNTC), with each corpora containing five sets of sub-corpus of Chinese literal texts produced in the 50s, 60s, 70s, 80s and from 90s to the present. Such a diachronically-organized corpus design is supposed to help reveal objective factors that may be involved in the subjective use of FCEXs by Chinese writers or translators such as the diachronic development of the Chinese language itself or the phraseological characteristics of each historical period, etc.

¹ e-mail: m.ji@imperial.ac.uk