A Critical Review of *DEGREE OF INTENSITY in English-Chinese translation: a corpus-based approach*

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Ⅰ Introduction

Most people engaged in Chinese-English translation research in China, including translators and interpreters, believe that Chinese is more inclined to use strong or exaggerated expressions, but this view has not been scientifically empirical research, including systematic quantitative research on Chinese and comparative research on English and Chinese. (Ouyang, 2013). For example, in a valid Chinese translation, although the English source text does not include the word "very", the Chinese translation text usually includes the word "hěn" (literally: very). DEGREE OF INTENSITY (DOI), which is is an interpersonal system that deals with this perceived difference in intensity in MOOD ADJUNCT within Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) (Halliday and Mattiessen 2014, 189)

The essay the author discusses here, based on the hypothesis - Chinese tends to use strong or exaggerated expressions more than English - three main research questions have been raised by Long and Canzhong as a guide in order to achieve the overall goal, including:

1. How is DOI expressed in English and Chinese? Is there any system that can measure the DOI of these two languages?

2. In the process of English-Chinese translation, what changes have taken place in terms of instance, frequency and degree? What are the semantic consequences?

3. To what extent do stylistic differences between English and Chinese and translators' choices influence this change?

Long and Canzhong aim to use a corpus-based approach to study this phenomenon, taking two best-selling books *Wild Swans* (Chang, 1991) and *Mao's Last Dancer* (Cunxin, 2009) and their respective Chinese translations as research objects , and compared with two reference corpora of non-translated texts (FLOB and LCMC)(Long Li & Canzhong Wu，2019). The results show that Chinese does favor stronger DOI, but also suggest that translator selection plays a significant role in DOI degree.

Ⅱ Critical Thoughts

Long and Canzhong from the introduction of the concept of Degree of intensity, to the classification of intensity in English and Chinese. This classification can be relatively detailed, as shown in Table 1 & Table 2. Especially in the English DOI vocabulary list, besides the common adverbs of degree, some additional adverbs proposed by Biber et al when discussing "adverbs of degree" were also extracted (Biber et al， 1999). At meantime, the list excerpts from Martin and White's vocabulary when they were discussing "isolating & maximization" (Martin&White, 2005).

Table 1 Classification of the DEGREE OF INTENSITY in English B: Biber et al. (1999, 556); M&W: Martin & White (2005, 141-142)

DEGREE OF INTENSITY	total	totally; utterly; entirely; completely; extremely (B); thoroughly (B); too (B); absolutely (B) neg. + a bit
	high	quite; almost; nearly; very (B) rather (M&W); fairly (M&W); greatly (M&W)
	low	scarcely; hardly slightly (B); somewhat (B) a bit (M&W) neg. + entirely; neg. + totally; neg. + utterly; neg. + completely; neg. + too

(Long Li & Canzhong Wu，2019)

Table 2 Classification of the DEGREE OF INTENSITY in Chinese (in traditional Characters) (based on Lü 1982/2002, 146–149)

Degree		
	total	極 至 絕 太 無限 十分 萬分[a] Additions made from Lu's dictionary entries: 完全 全部地 整個地 全然 徹底 完整地
	high	很 非常 挺 怪 特別 特 酷 大 老 甚 慌 厲害 Additions: 幾乎 差不多 將近 快要 近乎 相當 頗
	low	還 稍 少 小 有點 有些 點 些 不大 不很 不甚 不完全 Additions: 幾乎 + neg. 不完全 不全

[a]十分*shífēn* and 萬分*wànfēn* are both listed as adverbs rather than quantifiers in 现代汉语大词典 (Xiandai Hanyu Da Cidian 2017)

(Long Li & Canzhong Wu，2019)

Following this, Long and Canzhong explains the reasons for choosing the FLOB and LCMC databases, including representativeness, suitability of reference time - the difference between the collection time of the two corpora texts and the *Wild Swans'* English source text (ST) and Chinese target text (TT) within two years, free of charge and the vastness of the data. In order to analyze the typological differences between English and Chinese, Long and Canzhong makes a comparison between FLOB and LCMC (Table 4), and the results show that compared with English texts, Chinese text expressions are not only much higher in terms of intensity frequency, but also slightly higher in terms of intensity.

Table 4 Degree of Intensity in FLOB and LCMC

	Total	High	Low	Sum	Normalised frequencies (per 10,000)
FLOB	878 (26.13%)	2044 (60.83%)	438 (13.04%)	3360 (100%)	33.6
Top items	too: 506 completely: 90 entirely: 82 extremely: 66 totally: 45	very: 1081 almost: 394 quite: 250 nearly: 120 rather: 110	slightly: 118 hardly: 109 a bit: 103 somewhat: 56 scarcely: 20		
LCMC	1455 (29.82%)	2836 (58.11%)	589 (12.07%)	4880 (100%)	48.8
Top items	太*tài*: 342 十分*shífēn*: 319 极*jí*: 296 完全*wánquán*: 260 绝*jué*: 138	很*hěn*: 1726 大*dà*: 306 非常*fēicháng*: 219 几乎*jīhū*: 134 相当*xiāngdāng*: 126	些*xiē*: 194 稍*shāo*: 120 点*diǎn*: 114 还*hái*: 36 不太*bú tài*: 36 不大*bú dà*: 24		
FLOB-G (178,764 words)	114 (22.05%)	344 (66.54%)	59 (11.41)	517 (100%)	28.9
LCMC-G (129,746 words)	222 (24.13%)	592 (64.35%)	106 (11.52%)	920 (100%)	70.9

(Long Li & Canzhong Wu，2019)

On this basis, they continue to pass the concordance program SysConc (Wu, 2000) to test the Degree of Intensity in the ST & TT of *Wild Swans* and the Degree of Intensity in *Mao's Last Dancer* (Table 5&6). As shown in Table 5, there are much more intensity instances in Chinese TT of *Wild Swans* than in English ST, from 864 in ST to 1445 in TT increased by 67.2%. After comparing *Wild Swans* and *Mao's Last Dancer*, it is not difficult to find that the degree of intensity of translation of *Mao's Last Dancer* can be considered more faithful than that of *Wild Swans*; the TT in *Wild Swans* is more biased than the ST. The similarities between the two translations do show that typological preferences are more and to a higher extent influenced by Chinese than English. However, such a stark contrast between the two comparative translations suggests that the variation in *Wild Swans* cannot be considered merely random, or the result of Chinese typological preferences.

Table 5 Degree of Intensity in the ST & TT of *Wild Swans* (Chinese is in traditional characters)

	Total	High	Low	Sum
Wild Swans-ST	246 (28.51%)	529 (61.3%)	88 (10.19%)	863 (100%)
Top items	too: 114 extremely: 52 completely: 35 totally:12	very: 284 almost: 133 quite: 39 rather: 35 nearly: 23	hardly: 41 slightly: 15 scarcely: 9 a bit: 8 somewhat: 8	
Wild Swans-TT	444 (30.73%)	844 (58.41%)	157 (10.87%)	1445 (100%)
Top items	太*tài*: 130 極*jí*: 89 完全*wánquán*: 86 十分*shífēn*: 79	很*hěn*: 634 非常*fēicháng*: 89 幾乎*jīhū*: 57 特別*tèbié*: 23	點*diǎn*: 55 稍*shāo*: 30 幾乎 *jīhū* + neg.: 21 還*hái*: 18	

(Long Li & Canzhong Wu，2019)

Table 6 Degree of Intensity in *Mao's Last Dancer* (Chinese is in traditional characters)

	Total	High	Low	Sum
Mao's Last Dancer-ST	115 (37.83%)	168 (55.26%)	21 (6.91%)	304 (100%)
Top items	too: 74 completely: 21 totally: 6 extremely: 4	very: 109 nearly: 31 almost: 12 quite: 10	hardly: 8 slightly: 7 not too: 4 not totally | a bit: 1	
Mao's Last Dancer-TT	153 (18.3%)	637 (76%)	48 (5.7%)	838 (100%)
Top items	太*tài*: 76 極*jí*: 22 完全*wánquán*: 15 點*diǎn* + neg.: 11	很*hěn*: 514 非常*fēicháng*: 77 幾乎*jīhū*: 20 特別*tèbié*: 6	點*diǎn*: 14 不太*bú tài*: 9 些*xiē*: 7 稍*shāo*/還*hái* /幾乎*jīhū* + neg.: 4	

(Long Li & Canzhong Wu，2019)

Long and Canzhong do a good job in answering the research questions raised by themin their essay, through quantitative research, especially by using the Corpus Method for sufficient content analysis (Paul Baker, 2010). Although it is generally believed that it is better to adopt mixed methods for research, that is, to increase the content of qualitative research and overcome the limitations of one-dimensional methods for studying this complex phenomenon (Jo Angouri, 2010). However, it is worth noting that Long and Canzhong's research scope is limited to "translation research", in which quantitative research methods are sufficient. Qualitative research, including participant observation, unstructured interview and personal life history inquiry, etc., may affect the results and scientific nature of the research.

Long and Canzhong select two works by Chinese immigrant writers, both of which are autobiographical. One is *Wild Swans* by Chinese immigrant writer Jung Chang in the UK, and the other is Mao's Last Dancer by Chinese immigrant writer Cunxin Li in Australia. Since it is an autobiography, Long and Canzhong also compare Category G (Belles-lettres, biographies, essays) of FLOB (Mair, 1999) and Category G (biographies, essays) of LCMC (McEnery & Xiao, 2004) in the corpus. But what is the reason of choosing two immigrant writers? If choosing a writer whose native language is English, isn’ t it possible to rule out the tendency or habit of immigrants to bring their own Chinese habits into English works? Apparently, the answer is positive. That is, the author whose native language is Chinese, assuming that he or she speaks Chinese, will have a stronger DOI strength, which may affect his DOI in ST. The author thinks that striking novels such as Ironweed, which won the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction in 1984 (William, 1983), and his Chinese translation can be provided as options. Because choosing writers whose native language is English, or even writers whose native language is English and cannot speak Chinese, this can avoid the influence of Chinese habits on English.

In addition, the second question raised by the author about the article "DEGREE OF INTENSITY in English-Chinese translation" is why the classification of DOI does not include a moderate tone in the data analysis. Long and Canzhong classified Total, High and Low. Adverbs of degree should also have words that indicate degree is intermediate or balanced, and should not be easily divided into high or low, such as English words partially, partly, somewhat, etc. From Table 1, it's obvious to see that Long and Canzhong put words "somewhat" on the Low level, while the author prefers to classify it as a moderate mood word.

Here, the author will raise the third point of doubt. Although the collection time of the two corpora's texts is basically within two years of the difference between ST and TT of *Wild Swans*. However, the publication time of *Mao's Last Dancer* is obviously different from that of corpora. Is it possible to find a corpus that is closer in time? But if this is done, the two autobiographies selected before will be analyzed with different corpora, which will create another new problem - different reference objects. Therefore, the author's suggestion is to find two autobiographies or or other genres of fiction with similar publication times and translation release times, and use a corpora that matches as much as possible. For example, if the content of the analysis is an English product of the 1960s, it is recommended to use the LOB (LancasterOslo/Bergen) corpus of British English from 1961. Also, corpus methods should not be considered only quantitative, but a method that can combine qualitative and quantitative processes (Paul, 2010).

Long and Canzhong, in order to solve their second research question - what semantic consequences of DOI changes - studied specific examples in *Wild Swans*. Due to the high proportion of total strength of *Wild Swans* and the large number of DOI cases, TT of *Wild Swans* exhibits stronger strength than ST. Different from the Chinese translation of other novels, such as mystery novels, military novels and

science fiction, the Chinese translation of autobiography is a more personal or individualized narrative.

Chinese expresses a higher degree of intensity for matters related to the author himself, and correspondingly, less for historical interpretation. Changes in Mao's evaluation: The translated text reduces the criticism of Mao, but puts the main fault at Madame Mao. The ideological transformation of *Wild Swans* in the process of Chinese translation is reflected by the text environment of the total degree of intensity, which expresses the highest evaluation of interpersonal relationships. Finally, some DOI shifts and even omissions suggest corrections in Taiwanese translations of exaggerations and over-interpretations of Chinese politics and history in the English source texts.

The author believes that the discourse on the evaluation of historical figures is itself a product of ideology, or at least influenced by ideology. Analyzing the DOI of autobiographical historical novels, there must be no way to avoid the translator' s personal ideology in the translation process. It has to be admitted that *Wild Swans'* TT is the most critical of Mao, while *Wild Swans'* Taiwanese version is obviously less critical. What if it is assumed that the Taiwanese translation describes objective facts? Then, the change of DOI is not due to the change of ideology, but to change the DOI of the translated text based on facts or to correct a misunderstanding. But we can't judge whether ST or TT is closer to the truth. After all, it is easy to have different voices and opinions on some political issues in the world. Therefore, in the author's opinion, it is inappropriate for Long and Canzhong to use the *Wild Swans* as a text for analysis to a certain extent because of the political controversy of the text.

It is a pity that *Wild Swans* is not yet open in mainland China, and it is

considered a banned book. There is no doubt that China is the country with the largest number of Chinese-speaking people in the world. Even though *Wild Swans* has a wide range of popularity and great influence all over the world, its Chinese translation does not appear in the place where it most should appear-China mainland. It should be admitted that the Chinese TT of *Wild Swans* has lost some authority and validity. Even to a certain extent, Taiwan's prejudice against Mao can also be taken into account.

Ⅲ Conclusion

In this essay, Long and Canzhong have well answered their research questions through quantitative research methods. Although their research only tested English and Chinese, the study should be of interest to other linguists and translation scholars. After all, the hypothesis that Chinese tends to use stronger or more exaggerated terms than English is popular, but no systematic comparison has been made.

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