RESEARCH ARTICLE

EXPLORING WORD CLASS RELATIONS IN CHINESE-ENGLISH POLITICAL TRANSLATION: A CORPUS-BASED STUDY OF XI JINPING: THE GOVERNANCE OF CHINA II

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ABSTRACT - Translation universal has been an important domain of research in corpus-based translation studies. While previous studies have examined word class relations in prose translation and the diachronic change of explicitation in translation, there is a relative lack of research on word class relations in political translation. To address this gap, the study delves into word class relations in political translation using self-built comparable corpora of, specifically, the Chinese source texts (ST) and English target texts (TT) of Xi Jinping: The Governance of China II, as well as the original English texts (OET) of State of the Union Address 2013-2016. The results demonstrate that significant differences have been observed in most of the distributions of word classes in the ST, the TT, and the OET, yet the word classes in the TT are generally closer to their counterparts in the OET, which could be possibly interpreted through the translation team's guiding principle of "close to foreign audiences' ways of thinking". In addition, the word classes of the TT show different degrees of correlation with those of the ST, while the word classes of the OET have no significant correlation with either the ST or the TT, thus indicating the source language effect of word class translation. Hence, this study offers empirical and quantitative findings for understanding the linguistic features of Chinese political translation.

INTRODUCTION

Translation, a complex linguistic process, often results in a unique style known as translationese (Gellerstam, 1986). This style exhibits distinct linguistic norms that diverge from both the source language (SL) and the target language (TL) (Even-Zohar, 2009), embodying what has been termed the "third language" (Duff, 1981), the "third code" (Frawley, 1984), and "hybrid language" (Trosborg, 1997; Schäffner & Adab, 2001).

Owing to the advent of corpus-based translation studies toward the end of the 20th century, scholars have begun to study the linguistic features of the target language on a large scale and systematically (Baker, 1993, 1995). This led to the emergence of the concept of "translation universals" (Baker, 1993; Chesterman, 2004), defining features of translation that appear consistently across languages and are deemed unaffected by specific linguistic structures. Baker (1993) characterizes these universals as "features which typically occur in translated text rather than original utterances and which are not the result of interference from specific linguistic systems". An early framework for these universals was outlined by Toury (1977) as "universals of translational behaviour". Further comparative studies of English translational texts with non-English translational texts by Baker have identified four general features of translation: explicitation, simplification, normalization and levelling-out. Laviosa (1998) contributed to this body of knowledge by examining patterns of lexical usage in translational language, identifying characteristics such as a low ratio of substantive words to functional words, a high proportion of high-frequency words, a high repetition rate of words and reduced variance in the use of common words.

The rise of corpus linguistics has revolutionized the landscape of descriptive translation studies by providing tools and paradigms necessary for large-scale data analysis. As corpus-based translation studies are observable and reproducible, research into translation universals has been constantly verified and questioned in various languages by using real language materials. For instance, Ramón (2015) carried out a corpus-based study of several highly frequent Spanish adjectives in original texts and texts translated from English, explaining the differences in behavioural patterns with respect to the adjective position in original and translated Spanish from the perspective of translation universals or source language interference. The study shows that there is simplification, unique item under-representation and untypical collocations in Spanish translation of English source texts.

However, research on translation universals has predominantly focused on Western languages, particularly English texts translated from other European languages, while other languages have been largely overlooked. Many scholars have tried introducing non-European language materials to provide evidence support for the universal features of translated languages. Vaičenonien (2014) analyzed in her research that the type-token ratio (TTR) of translated Lithuanian fictions

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is lower than that of native Lithuanian fictions with lower noun density, and function words constitute a greater proportion of the whole wordlist than the most frequently used words in the original texts, from which it can be observed that the translated Lithuanian fictions is not diverse in vocabulary, going in agreement with Laviosa's research on simplification in translation. Similarly, Tsai (2021) compared 800 translated and comparable non-translated texts of patent abstracts published in Taiwan during the past 20 years and suggests that 1) translated texts have lower lexical density and shorter sentence length than their counterparts in non-translated texts; 2) translated texts display more conventional language use and tended to contain a complete opening sentence in the abstract, indicating simplification and normalization in translated texts; 3) more frequent use of passive verbs in non-translated texts and active verbs in translated texts may reflect the interference from the source text. Moreover, by comparing the syntactic complexity of the Chinese-English translation of the chairman's statements and original English texts, it is found that the translated chairman's statement is significantly simpler in subordination and overall sentence complexity, and has a longer length of production units, uses more coordinate phrases and complex nominals than their non-translated counterparts. Simplification exists in half of the 14 syntactic complexity measures, providing evidence for simplification universal (Wang, Liu, & Moratto, 2023).

As one of the basic grammatical categories, word class conveys semantic meaning and is a conventionalized imagery (Langacker, 2008). Its switch is the change at the construal level, and the frequent occurrence of a certain word class is likely to suggest a certain meaning. Corpus-based contrastive analysis of word class on its corresponding relationship can help understand the rendering rules in translation, provide an empirical basis, and lay the foundation for an accurate description of the features of translated language. Political discourse, often found in government work reports and speeches by authorities, is imbued with policy-specific terminology, specialized lexicon, and vocabulary that carries cultural nuances, which are a direct manifestation of a nation's political strategies, cultural values, and international diplomatic positions, exerting profound domestic and international influence. The political texts and their translations, characterized by their specialized, precise, rigorous, and standardized linguistic choices, offer a treasure trove of material for this research and for future scholarly explorations. In light of this, our study probes into the differences in the distribution of word class in political translation using self-built comparable corpora of, specifically, the Chinese source texts (ST) and English target texts (TT) of *Xi Jinping: The Governance of China II*, as well as the original English texts (OET) of *State of the Union Address 2013-2016*. It is necessary to include OET because examining OET enables us to contextualize the translational maneuvers in the TT against the OET. By juxtaposing the TT against the OET, we can identify specific translational maneuvers that may not be evident when analyzing ST and TT in isolation. This approach aligns with the framework proposed by House (2015), who emphasizes the importance of considering multiple texts to fully grasp the complexities of translation dynamics. By elucidating the correlation among various word classes, we seek to expand the current genres engaged in translation studies on word-class relations and to shed light on the maneuvers of Chinese institutional translation by way of translational discursive features.

SOURCE LANGUAGE EFFECT

In recent years, corpus-based translation studies typically initiate their inquiries with an emphasis on specific linguistic factors either to seek comparative frameworks that may involve interlingual, intralingual or a combination of both approaches, or to analyse and identify through probabilistic and statistical methods the linguistic features in translated texts that either adhere to hypotheses of translation universals or exhibit broader, generalizable patterns. Grammatical categories, such as word class, have been used in numerous studies to testify certain translation universals. These categories serve as indicators of the features of the translated language, the original language and the source language. However, little attention is paid to the word class relations between the source text and the translated text, that is, the source language effect on word classes. Newmark (1991) defined "source language interference" in his early book *About Translation*, proposing both a narrow and a broad interpretation. The narrow interpretation pertains to the obvious inappropriate transfer of source language features to the target language, commonly referred to as "translationese"; conversely, the broad interpretation refers to any features that may come from the influence of the source language, which he regards as an intrinsic attribute of the translation process.

This broader interpretation has been further elaborated upon by certain scholars, who term it the "translation-specific language" (Yang & Li, 2021). Certain features of translational language can be attributed to source language "interference" (Toury, 2012), which will change under the influences of "source language shining through" (Teich, 2003), text types, translation methods and other factors (Lapshinova-Koltunski & Zampieri, 2018). For instance, Xiao and Dai (2013) explored the lexical and grammatical properties of translational Chinese using two balanced comparable corpora of native and translational Chinese, which shows that TL unique item under-representation might serve as the indicator of SL interference; furthermore, the greater mean word/sentence segment length, the frequent use of affixes, pronouns and light verbs, and the differences in using passive voice are all relative to SL interference in English-to-Chinese translation. Steiner (2013), in comparison of the translations and originals within each of the two languages (English and German), indicated that interferences can be observed based on three facts: the lexical density of English originals is higher than that of the translations; TTRs are higher for English translations than for originals in 3 out of 8 registers and the global figure is slightly higher for originals than for translations; the N/V proportionalities of German translations have moved slightly towards their English originals in comparison to German originals.

POLITICAL TRANSLATION

Political text, as a non-literary text, is instrumental in presenting a nation's conditions, its national policies and the government's views and attitudes on major issues, which plays a significant role in building up China's international communication capacity against the backdrop of its increasing international status and influence. English translations of political documents, which present information about China to the international community and overseas readers, serve as key instruments in shaping the international perception of the Chinese government and the country itself. The term "political text" encompasses a diverse array of genres or styles that serve varying political ends across distinct political contexts (Schäffner, 2004). The topics discussed in it are mainly related to politics, such as political activities, political concepts and political relations. Distinctions though can be made between institutional politics and quotidian politics; translation studies tend to focus more on the political texts or styles related to institutions. Chinese scholar Yang (2008) proposed the concept of "political equivalence", which posits that diplomatic translation must accurately and faithfully render the political ideas of the speaker and the political context of the source language. At the same time, it should be delicately integrated with the linguistic forms of the target language that the readership can understand; this integration ensures that the political implications of both parties are equivalent, enabling the target text to perform the same communicative function as the source text. Diplomatic language, closely related to international politics, acts as an important tool and "weapon" in foreign affairs (Lu et al., 2008). It is highly politically sensitive and strongly politically orientated, distinguishing it from scientific language and literary language. Therefore, political translation differs from other types of translation (Yang, 2012).

Most of the studies on English translation of political text in the Chinese academia discuss the translation strategies of political texts based on specific translation theories, mainly including Skopos, Functional Equivalence, Political Equivalence and Eco-translatology among others, with case studies on specific texts such as the *Report of the Work of the Government*, the *Report on 19th CPC National Congress* and *Xi Jinping: The Governance of China* (Yao, Li, & Zhu, 2023). Research into political discourse has mainly explored the characteristics of political language, individual political text and genre, the specific semantic translation of political terms, neologism, culture-loaded words, political metaphors, political discourse dissemination, and the social and political reasons for adopting specific translation strategies and their effects (Liu & Li, 2022). Other studies related to "corpus" and "political text" in a Chinese context yield few related papers and their research focuses are mainly high-frequency words, length features, linguistic features, etc. In addition, recent research on linguistic features of political text has highlighted a lot of word class (FitzGerald, 2020; Marusic & Katavic-Causic, 2018), nominalization (Zhang, 2022), explicitation (Yang & Lu, 2022) and translation clarity (El-Farahaty & Elewa, 2020). To narrow the gap, the study examines word class relations in political translation using self-built comparable corpora of the Chinese ST and English TT of *Xi Jinping: The Governance of China II*, as well as the OET of *State of the Union Address 2013-2016*.

TEXT CORPUS AND ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORKS

This study explores the word class relations between Chinese ST and English TT in political discourse, based on self-built comparable corpora comprising a total of 315,659 tokens. The corpora consist of three sub-corpora: the Chinese ST, English TT and the OET, which was introduced mainly for observing the similarity in the use of word class between itself and the English TT. The Chinese ST is derived from *Xi Jinping: Governance of China II* (hereafter *Governance of China*), edited by the Publicity Department of the Central Committee of the CPC with the Central Institute of Party History and Literature, and the China Foreign Languages Publishing Administration; the text, which spans 26 chapters, is considerably authoritative as well as representative. The corresponding English TT was prepared by experts from institutions such as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Central Compilation and Translation Bureau. The team, with years of experience in international publicity and translation, has ensured accuracy and readability. To guarantee quality, the TT has undergone three rounds of reviews and proofreading, following more than ten rounds of thorough readings and amendments (Wang, 2020). The TT is highly acceptable, widely and effectively broadcast (Si & Zeng, 2021). The OET adopted for this study is the *State of the Union Address 2013-2016*, which was published roughly at the same time as the works included in the *Governance of China* (2014-2017) were published. The scope was narrowed down to 2013-2016 to avoid possible differences in the language style of the *State of the Union Address 2017* as it was delivered by the new authority.

This study was developed on the basis of the analysis approach for word class relations in translation proposed by Ding (2020). To achieve word class correspondence in Chinese and English as much as possible, text part of speech (POS) coding was accomplished through CoreNLP[1] developed by Stanford NLP. CoreNLP was called through PyCharm 4.5.4, a Python language development platform. CoreNLP is highly accurate and the Penn Treebank tagsets it applied keep high consistency among different languages, making it suitable for cross-language comparable analysis of word class. It is worth noting that predicate adjectives (VA) in Chinese coding are equivalent to adjectives in English syntactically and semantically. Thus, they were categorized as adjectives. As English prepositions and subordinating conjunctions are both coded by CoreNLP into the word class "IN", further dissections were carried out through the syntactic parser it provides.

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[1] For an introduction to this tool, please refer to https://stanfordnlp.github.io/CoreNLP/

After building the three sub-corpora respectively, the frequencies of the major word classes shared by Chinese and English languages in each text were calculated, which includes nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, prepositions and conjunctions. Then the percentage of each word class in the texts was calculated. Notional words (noun, verb, adjective and adverb) served as the indicator of text lexical density, and function words (preposition and conjunction) as the indicator of text syntactic complexity. As the study focuses on the changes and relations of word class during translation, word classes with relatively minor changes (such as numerals and pronouns) were not concluded in the analysis; and word classes existing only in English (such as articles in English) was regarded as irrelevant data and discarded.

In addition to the major word class data, two indicators for lexical richness were introduced, which are the type-token ratio (TTR) and the percentage of hapax legomena (words that appear only once) in the text, to further research the existence of correlations among other word class. Given the TTR might be greatly skewed by text size and the length of the texts used to build the corpora in this paper is over thousands of words, the standardized type-token ratio (STTR) based on a thousand-word benchmark was adopted.

DATA ANALYSIS

Differences in the Distribution of Word Class

The initial step in our analysis involved applying a t-test to investigate the existence of significant differences in the corresponding units between the Chinese ST and the English TT, as well as between the OET and the English TT. Figure 1 presents a scatter plot of the numerical distribution of the percentage of each word class. Each group of columns represents a word class (i.e., adjectives, verbs, nouns, etc. from left to right), and each column within these groups represents the ST, the TT and the OET from left to right. This visual representation intuitively shows the ratio of each word class in each text, with red lines marking the mean value. To be specific, the points present the trend of central clustering and peripheral dispersion, which indicates basically or nearly normal distribution.
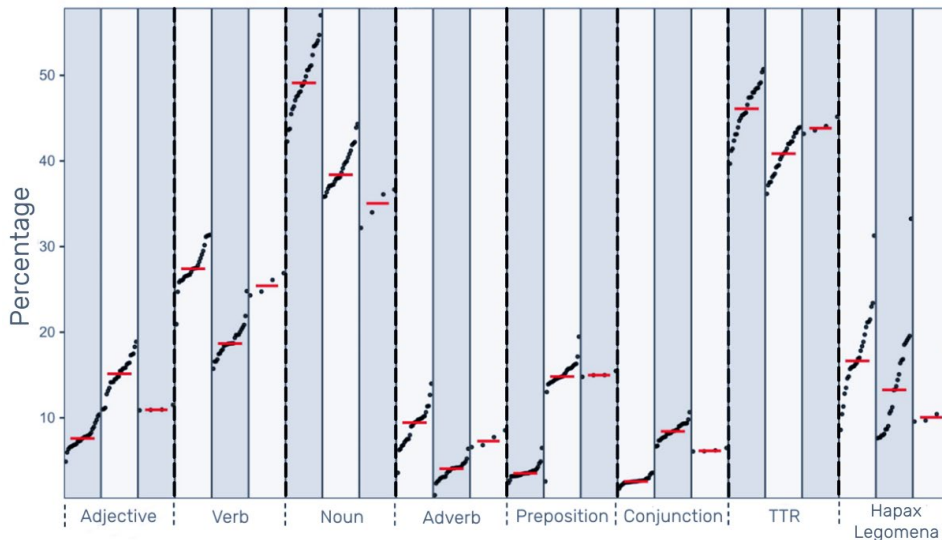

Figure 1. Numerical distribution of the percentage of each word class

In terms of differences, adverbs, prepositions and conjunctions are concentrated in the three texts, while nouns and hapax legomena are relatively dispersed. This dispersion suggests significant individual differences among texts concerning these two features. Although the TT aligns with the ST from a translation perspective, the percentage of the TT is closer to the OET in most items and deviates from the ST. This observation reveals that the target language may have a greater influence on the translated language than the source language in the use of word class, which is likely to be interpreted through the translation team's guiding principle of "close to target readerships".

One interesting finding in this study is that the TT surpasses the ST and the OET with regard to adjectives and conjunctions. Zhang (2016) believes that the translation of central government documents, embodying the gravitas of sensitive topics, is precise in language use and flexible in interlingual conversion. As a prominent case of the translation of the central government's documents, the *Governance of China* is reasonably flexible in linguistic conversion, which accommodates the "acceptability" required for political translation (Zhou, 2020). A possible explanation might be that the expert translation team, under the framework of English grammar and logic rules, adopted specific conversion and explicitation approaches on the basis of high language acumen and the strategic orientation of "close to overseas audiences' thinking way". For example, the ST contains numerous phrases where attributive noun exists (e.g., *ge ming lao qu*, old revolutionary base areas; *guo jia sheng tai an quan*, national ecological security, etc.). To align the translation as closely as possible with the linguistic habits of the target readership, it is inevitable to convert the attributive nouns into adjectives. Therefore, as shown in Figure 1, the ratio of adjectives in the TT is higher than that in the ST, while the ratio of nouns correspondingly declined. That keeps in line with the basic principles of international publicity and

translation, respecting the thinking way and reading habits of overseas readers, and avoiding "mechanical translation" or "word-for-word translation" (Wang, 2020). Moreover, the Chinese version of *Governance of China* conforms to the parataxis features of the source language, which will reduce the use of logical markers and cohesive markers, while the OET tends to use formal markers for overt cohesion and logic. Thus, explicitation of the covert logical information was carried out in the TT by adding conjunctions, which simultaneously enhanced contextual cohesion and "readability". It can be observed that the ratio of adjectives and conjunctions used in the TT is higher than that in the OET, revealing a trend of "exaggerating the typical features and expressions of the target language" (Baker, 1996), which makes the translated language more standardized than the original target-language text.

In addition to the significant differences, the mean value of the TT is very close to that of the OET in terms of preposition, which, combined with the above discussions, indicates possibilities that the English TT could be a "third code" that is different from both OET and the Chinese ST but shows sort of intimacy with the target language. Thus, after the t-test, statistical data (table 1) indicate that after the t-test, there were significant differences between the TT and the OET in all word classes except for nouns, prepositions, and hapax legomena. Meanwhile, significant differences were observed between the TT and the ST in the majority of word classes (only nouns showing no significant difference). With regard to the ST and the OET, significant differences were observed in word classes but verbs, nouns and adverbs. It can be found that there are differences in most items when comparing the TT with the OET or with the ST, though the former is less than the latter.

Table 1. Significance test of inter-language differences in word class

Category	English TT – the OET	English TT – Chinese ST	Chinese ST – the OET
Adjective	**	***	***
Verb	***	*	-
Noun	-	-	-
Adverb	***	***	-
Preposition	-	***	***
Conjunction	**	***	***
TTR	***	***	**
Hapax Legomena	-	**	*

Note: "***" $p < 0.001$, "**" $p < 0.01$, "*" $p < 0.05$, "-" $p \geq 0.05$; similarly hereinafter

Word Class Categories and Textual Discrimination

After delving into the differences in the distribution of language features among texts in different languages, the impact of the three sets of language features, namely, "nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs", "prepositions, conjunctions", "TTR, hapax legomena", on textual discrimination will be discussed hereinafter the study. The above three feature sets represent lexical density, syntactic complexity and lexical richness respectively. The analysis began with the application of Principal Component Analysis (PCA) to discern latent principal dimensions within the feature set data and their various permutations, based on which the k-means clustering algorithm implemented in the R was employed to classify texts of diverse types and the classification accuracy was computed by comparing the results against the actual classifications of texts.

Table 2. Discrimination of various text combinations by feature sets and their permutations

Feature Set (permutation)	Chinese ST - English TT	Chinese ST - OET	English TT - OET	Chinese ST - English TT - OET
Nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs	92.16	94.01	60.11	75.21
Prepositions, conjunctions	99.31	**98.27**	**68.44**	**77.36**
TTR, hapax legomena	63.23	58.31	63.32	45.07
nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs + prepositions, conjunctions	96.55	98.23	55.17	75.36
nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs + TTR, Hapax Legomena	98.12	98.12	57.96	66.96
Nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs + prepositions, conjunctions + TTR, hapax legomena	**99.41**	**98.27**	66.11	71.85

Note: The numbers in the table indicate the accuracy of discrimination between the text combinations. The larger the number, the higher the accuracy of discrimination.

Data in Table 2 reveal the significant similarities between the TT and the OET in terms of the distribution of word class. It is challenging to differentiate these two texts on the basis of the feature sets involving word class. Additionally, the "prepositions, conjunctions" feature set, which reflects syntactic complexity, shows the highest discrimination in the "Chinese ST – OET" and the "Chinese ST - English TT - OET" text combinations, as well as in the "English TT - OET" combination. Interestingly, the "TTR, hapax legomena" feature set scored lower points in all four text combinations, which suggests that lexical richness is not a primary inter-language discriminator. In the "Chinese ST - English TT" text combination, the three permutations of feature sets are the most distinguishable.

Correlation Analysis of Word Class Categories

Aside from the different distributions of word classes in various texts, certain connections among word classes exist within the same text or between texts and their translations. These connections can be verified by correlation analysis, specifically, by calculating the Pearson correlation coefficients among various linguistic features of various texts. The calculation was performed using the data from the Chinese ST and its English TT as well as the data from the OET. The results reveal no significant correlation of any word class between the OET and either the TT or the ST, which lends support to the fact that the OET is not necessarily related to the other two texts. However, we did find a high positive correlation between hapax legomena and TTR. In detail, nouns and adjectives are significantly positively correlated with hapax legomena, while verbs and adverbs show the opposite trend, from which we infer that hapax legomena, predominantly nouns, tend to serve a rhetorical function or are highly context-bound. These nouns entail novel concepts or entities, such as "*zu qun* (ethnic group)", "*zu pu* (genealogy)" and "*zhu chan qu* (major producing areas)".

Additionally, the word class categories that are positively correlated between the TT and the ST are, in order, TTR, hapax legomena, noun, adjective, verb, adverb, conjunction and preposition. This presents a significant positive correlation between the TT and the ST, which implies that the adaptation of word class in Chinese translated text is significantly affected by the English source text, highlighting the source language effect. Verbs in the TT are positively correlated with verbs and adverbs in Chinese, while negatively with the rest of the word classes, which indicates that a certain relation exists between verbs in the TT and word classes in the ST. This relation can be further elucidated in future studies and the studies on political discourse translation will be advanced toward a more balanced and multidisciplinary-analysis-based trajectory.

CONCLUSION

This study, using self-built comparable corpora of political documents, made comparisons of word class distributions among the Chinese ST and the English TT of *Xi Jinping: The Governance of China II* as well as the OET of *State of the Union Address 2013-2016*, and delved into the influence of shared word class categories on textual discrimination and the correlation regarding linguistic features between the ST and the TT. Through the study, research on word class relations has been enlarged to political genre, addressing the gap in corpus-based quantitative research on political discourse (Liu & Li, 2022). The findings demonstrate that significant differences have been observed in most of the distributions of word classes in the ST, the TT, and the OET, yet the word classes in the TT align more closely with their counterparts in the OET, reflecting the tendency towards domestication strategy in the translation of Chinese political texts for better communications with the target readership, which echos the translation team's guiding principle of "close to overseas audiences' thinking way". In addition, the word classes of the TT show varying degrees of correlation with those of the ST, but the word classes of the OET show no significant correlation with either the ST or the TT, thus indicating the source language effect of word class translation. Through this research, empirical and quantitative findings are offered for understanding the linguistic features embodied in Chinese political translation. However, the limited quantity of the OET suggests potential for expansion. Future studies could employ multiple regression analysis to examine the specific relations between the verbs in the TT and word classes in the ST, thereby enriching the understanding of word class relations in English-translated political texts. We hope this study could serve as a stepping stone towards a more comprehensive understanding of the relations inherent in political translation.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Yucheng ZHONG (Writing - original draft, Conceptualization, Investigation, Data and Analysis)

Enci HUANG (Data and Analysis, Validation)

Qijun SONG (Writing - review & editing, Methodology, Data and Analysis, Funding Acquisition)

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

SL   source language

TL   target language

ST   source text

TT   target text

OET   original English text

TTR   type-token ratio

STTR   standardized type-token ratio

POS   part of speech

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