

Corpus-based Comparative Study on Chinese Versions of *Gitanjali*—A Case Study on Bingxin's and Bai Kaiyuan's Versions*

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The mysterious religious color and influence of *Gitanjali* have always been the research topic for Chinese scholars. However, up to now there are still very few comparative studies on its translations, and among the very few comparative studies on *Gitanjali*, Bing Xin's version is regarded by most scholars as more popular and readable. In order to analyze the differences between the two Chinese versions by Bing Xin and Bai Kaiyuan in an objective and scientific manner, this paper makes a corpus-based comparative study on the two versions. The results show that, compared to Bing Xin's version, Bai Kaiyuan's version boasts greater words diversity, stronger readability and deeper emotions. The differences between these two versions can be explained by the development of Chinese vocabularies and rich modifiers which are used by Bai Kaiyuan.

Keywords: *Gitanjali*, Bing Xin, Bai Kaiyuan, Corpus

Introduction

Gitanjali, a Nobel Prize winning work, is the greatest work which has brought Rabindranath Tagore worldwide reputation and popularity ever since its publication. William Butler Yeats once stated in the preface that this collection of poems was "rich" and "simple", "showing a world that I've been dreaming about" (Yeats, 1918). Some scholars attempted to apprehend *Gitanjali* from the perspective of Christian, considering that the God in the collection "was a Christian God, and we could see how Christian in India looked like from Tagore (Dimock, Jr., 1959), while some scholars rebutted the mysticism and religion in the collection. Mary M. Lago believed that "the most basic feature of Tagore's collection was neither romance nor mysticism, but realism and humanitarianism" (Lago, 1973-1974). *Indian Writing in English* which was written by K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar (1962) and *A History of India English Literature* written by M. K. Naik both devoted a considerable amount of space to Tagore. Ezra Pound commented that he "found a new Greece" from the unique quietness of the collection and put the spirits within *Gitanjali* and the happiness displayed in *New Testament* on a par. He also noted that *Gitanjali* had a strong musicality (ZHOU, 2012). Linn Cary Mehta put forward in his doctoral dissertation that Tagore's translation behavior has an effect of decolonization (Mehta, 2004).

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In China, Jin Kemu and Liu Jian were the pioneers who gave relatively comprehensive description of *Gitanjali* in the early days. On *Explanation of Tagore's "What is Art" and "Gitanjali"*, which was written by Jin Kemu, mainly addressed the puzzles of Chinese readers when reading *Gitanjali*, and pointed out that such puzzles were mainly due to Chinese readers' unfamiliarity of the religious affection of "hypostatic union" (Jin, 1981). On *Gitanjali* which was written by Lu Jian was the most comprehensive study of *Gitanjali* in Chinese academic circle so far. It introduced the writing background of *Gitanjali*, the relationship between English poems in *Gitanjali* and Bengali poems, and the translation in the West and China on it. It also explored the ideological contents, artistic characteristics and overall structure of *Gitanjali* (LIU, 1987). However, the study on the translation of *Gitanjali* is rarely seen nowadays. Zeng Qiong in his "*Tagore in the World Literature: Gitanjali Translation Introduction and Research*" pointed out that although there were many studies on the ideology, the artistic value, and the impact of *Gitanjali* in recent years, there were few studies on the translation of *Gitanjali*. Most of the existing studies focus on the comparison between the Chinese translated version and the original English version of *Gitanjali*, trying to review the cultural and psychological similarities and differences, and the characteristics of different language works from the relationship between translator and author as well as the relationship between translation and the original text (ZENG, 2012). This paper attempts to compare the two Chinese versions of Bing Xin and Bai Kaiyuan objectively with the purpose of filling the research gap in this regard.

Corpus Selection and Research Design

Corpus Selection

The paper selects the translation of Bing Xin (1900-1999) and Bai Kaiyuan (1945--) for a comparative study and establishes a small comparative corpus based on that. Bing Xin's translation was firstly published in 1955 by the People's Literature Publishing House. It is currently the most popular and widely accepted among readers and researchers. In recent years, the translation by Bai Kaiyuan, *Gitanjali: Tagore's Lyric Poems Appreciation (English with Chinese parallel text)* published in 2006 by the China Radio and Television Press, is of high quality and popularity. Although the two Chinese versions are half a century apart in time, they each stood as a typical version of their own respective times, and both of them used vernacular Chinese, thus comparable.

Research Design

The paper starts from three aspects to conduct the comparative study on the two versions. First, vocabulary. Type-token ratio is a regularly used method to measure the lexical density of a text. Generally speaking, the bigger the ratio is, the richer the language is. Second, sentence. Here, it means the average sentence length. A longer average sentence shows more abundant information with stronger readability. Third, discourse. Here, it means the usage of personal pronouns. It is aimed at primarily exploring the usage of personal pronouns and its differences with the original, so as to discuss and analyze the causes of such differences between the two versions of Bing Xin and Bai Kaiyuan.

The main corpus software used in the paper is: ICTCLAS; the main text retrieval is PowerConc1.0.

Corpus Statistical Results and Analysis of the Chinese Version of *Gitanjali*

Statistical Results and Analysis of Vocabulary

As a statistical magnitude, type refers to any unique morphology in the corpus. In other words, the same repeating token can only be marked as one type. Token means every word in a text. Type-token ratio (TTR) is equal to $\text{type}/\text{token} \times 100\%$. The statistics of vocabulary in this section are retrieved by PowerConc1.0 and the results are as follows:

Table 1

Type-token Ratio of the Two Versions

Project	Bing Xin's	Bai Kaiyuan's
Number of Types	1073	1244
Number of Tokens	12079	11967
Type-token Ratio (%)	8.88	10.40

(Note: Since the size of the two corpora is very close, standardizing the type-token ratio is not considered.)

Based on the type-token ratio of the two versions shown in the above table, it can be clearly found that the type-token ratio of Bai Kaiyuan's translation is 10.40, which is greater than that of Bing Xin's 8.88. Hence, it can be concluded that Bai Kaiyuan uses less repeating words, which means that the vocabulary is richer.

Statistical Results and Analysis of Sentence

In this section, the average sentence length of Bing Xin's and Bai Kaiyuan's translations is considered as the research objective. The average sentence length = total number of words/total number of sentences. The longer the average sentence length is, the more difficult the sentence is. PowerConc1.0 is also applied for retrieval. The results are shown as below:

Table 2

Statistical Results of the Average Sentence of the Two Versions

Project	Bing Xin's	Bai Kaiyuan's
Total Number of Words	18260	18262
Total Number of Sentences	679	649
Average Sentence Length	26.89	28.14

It can be found that the average sentence length of Bai Kaiyuan's translation is 28.14, which is greater than that of Bing Xin of 26.89. We can roughly argue that the difficulty level of Bai's is greater than Bing Xin's.

However, the longer average sentence length does not necessarily mean greater difficulties or richer words, because the idiom usage is also a factor affecting the length of the sentence. If idioms are more, the length of sentence will be shorter, the translation is more concise, and the text is more beautiful. Therefore, taking into account this factor, in order to make the conclusion more comprehensive and objective, this section adds the detection of idiom use of the two versions. The results are as follows:

Table 3

Statistical Results of Idioms Use of the Two Versions

Project	Bing Xin's Translation	Bai Kaiyuan's Translation
Number of Idiom Use	21	79

In idioms use, the idiom use in Bai Kaiyuan's translation is much more than Bing Xin's. Based on the above results, the average sentence length and idiom use of Bai Kaiyuan's translation are larger than those of Bingxin's translation. Therefore, we can conclude that the words of Bai Kaiyuan's translation are richer, and the translation is more beautiful.

Statistical Results and Analysis of Personal Pronouns in the Original Text and the Two Translations

Similarly, we can apply PowerConc software to conduct statistics on the personal pronouns in the original text and the two versions. The results are as follows:

Table 4

Statistical Results of Usage of Personal Pronouns in the Original Text and the Two Translations

Project	Bing Xin's Translation	Bai Kaiyuan's Translation	The original Text'
Number of Personal Pronouns Use	1855	1720	844

First, from Table 4 we can find that both of the two translations use more personal pronouns than the original text. This is completely different from what we know about the difference between English and Chinese. In English, people tend to use pronouns to make the text more coherent while in Chinese people often omit subjects for language coherence. Through the comparison between the original text and the translations, we can conclude that the main reason for this phenomenon is that the two translators have translated English poetry into the form of prose poems. In English poetry, subjects are often omitted, but in Chinese prose poem, a lot of personal pronouns must be added in order to make readers clearly understand, and that is exactly why the two versions use more personal pronouns than the original text. At the same time, it also reflects the common problem of most translators: the translator put too much emphasis on the form which leads to more usage of personal pronouns in Chinese translations than the original text.

Analysis of the Differences between the Chinese Versions of *Gitanjali*

The above statistical results indicate that the token-type ratio, average sentence length and idiom usage in Bai Kaiyuan's translation are higher than those in Bing Xin's translation. We can draw primary conclusion that Bai Kaiyuan's translation has richer words than Bing Xin's, and the language is more beautiful. Therefore, this section analyzes the differences in the data of the two translations of *Gitanjali* to explore the reasons behind the difference between the two versions.

Words Selection of the Translation under the Influence of the Chinese Vocabulary Development

Language is not immutable; instead, it is creative (HU, 2006, p. 6). Any language develops with the times. With the evolution of the times, the language develops with the social changes. Words, as the smallest free form of expression, are most easily perceived and change pretty fast (HU, 2006, p. 72). Professor Wang Huan also pointed out "The language changes to adapt to the changing needs of social life. If the social life has changed, the language will inevitably change. We also know that the grammar of language is changing relatively slowly, while the vocabulary changes relatively quickly. The Chinese language also develops following the pattern of general language" (WANG, 1982). He also mentioned in "The Changes of the Chinese Vocabulary since the Founding of the People's Republic of China" that words changed fastest in the early couples of years since the founding of People's Republic. Bing Xin's and Bai Kaiyuan's translations appeared after the founding of P.R.C., so both of them experienced the rapid development of Chinese vocabulary. In

addition, Bing Xin lived in the first few decades of rising of the new cultural movement, which was the early stage of the development of vernacular, while Bai Kaiyuan lived in a period when modern Chinese language is relatively more mature. Hence, they can inevitably reflect the characteristics of Chinese language development. Next, examples will be given to illustrate this point.

In the second poem of *Gitanjali*, Bing Xin translated the original word of “singer” into “*ge zhe*”, while Bai Kaiyuan translated it as “*ge shou*”. In real life, the word “*ge zhe*” is not as familiar as “*ge shou*”. In the fifth poem, the word “summer” is translated into “*yan shu*” by Bing Xin and “*xia tian*” by Bai Kaiyuan. In practical use, the term “*xia tian*” is significantly more common than the term “*yan shu*”. In the ninth poem, the translation of “beggar” by Bai Kaiyuan is “*qi gai*” which is more in line with the Chinese language usage than the translation “*qi ren*” by Bing Xin. In the eleventh poem, “the flood of the assurance” is translated into “guaranteed answer” by Bing Xin, which makes people feel obscure, because in most cases “guarantee (*bao zheng* in Chinese)” is often used as a verb in Chinese, for example “ensure to complete the task” and so on.

The above examples only list the vocabulary changes displayed in *Gitanjali*. In the two translations, the differences in vocabulary used can be found everywhere, but we cannot list all of them. According to the above examples, we can also boldly speculate that the word repetition rate obtained in Bai Kaiyuan’s translation through corpus software is much lower than that of Bing Xin’s translation, and that is closely related to the development of vocabulary. With the development of the Chinese vocabulary, new words are emerging, which affects the richness of the two translators in the use of words.

Expression of Translation Emotion under the Usage of Modifiers

In the statistics of average sentence length in the above corpus, the average sentence length of Bai Kaiyuan’s translation is slightly longer than that of Bing Xin. After comparing the two translations, the author finds that the translation of Bai Kaiyuan makes good use of the modifiers to express emotion. In such a way, the length of the sentence is extended and the translation is emotionally richer and readable. See Example (1) and (2):

Example (1) In the 11th poem:

He is there where the tiller is tilling the hard ground and where the pathmaker is breaking stones. He is with them in sun and in shower, and his garment is covered with dust.

他是在锄着枯地的农夫那里，在敲石的造路工人那里。太阳下，阴雨里，他和他们同在，衣袍上蒙着尘土。
(冰心译)

他去的地方，农夫在锄耕贫瘠的农田，工人在敲石筑路。他与大家一起头顶烈日，栉风沐雨，衣服沾染灰尘。
(白开元译)

This sentence describes a scene where the emperor and people worked in the fields together. By comparing the two translations, both Bai Kaiyuan’s “贫瘠的农田” and Bing Xin’s “枯地” refer to the farmers’ fields. Bai Kaiyuan’s “贫瘠的农田” is more commonly used and more understandable than “枯地”. As for “In the sun and in shower”, Bai Kaiyuan uses two four-word expressions “头顶烈日，栉风沐雨” to express the scene of sharing happiness and woe between the emperor and people, while Bing Xin uses “太阳里，阴雨里，他和他们同在”. Obviously, Bai Kaiyuan’s version shows more profound expression of emotions. After reading the whole sentence, the reader can find that Bai Kaiyuan’s description of the emperor is more vivid.

Example (2) In the 28th poem:

My debts are large, my failures great, my shame secret and heavy; yet when i come to ask for my good. I quake in fear lest my prayer be granted.

我的负债很多，我的失败很大，我的耻辱秘密而又深重；但当我来求福的时候，我又战栗，唯恐我的祈求得到允诺。（冰心译）

我负债累累，遭到巨大的失败。我的愧疚隐秘而深重；但当我向你祈求幸福时，全身瑟瑟颤抖，唯恐我的祈求得到满足。（白开元译）

Through “负债累累”，“巨大的失败”，and “瑟瑟颤抖”，Bai Kaiyuan vividly depicts the tragic situation and nervous heart. However, Bing Xin’s “负债很多”，“失败很大”，and “战栗”read like spoken language with a flat tone, which cannot make readers impressive.

Conclusion

On the basis of corpus, the paper makes a comparative study of the Chinese translations of *Gitanjali* by Bing Xin and Bai Kaiyuan. The results show that the token-type ratio, average sentence length and idiom usage of Bai Kaiyuan’s translation are higher than those of Bing Xin’s translation. It can be concluded that the translation of Bai Kaiyuan has richer words, greater information capacity and more gracefulness than Bing Xin. Through the specific textual comparison, we find that the development and change of Chinese vocabulary is the key influencing two translators. Owing to the generation and usage of a large number of new words, the repetition rate of vocabulary in Bai Kaiyuan’s translation is lower. As for the influence of the average sentence length of two translators, it can be found that Bai Kaiyuan is good at using modifiers. On the one hand, modifiers can increase the length of sentence; on the other hand modifiers render the translation with profound emotions.

Gitanjali is one of Tagore’s works which has won the worldwide reputation. It shares a higher theoretical research value. But as for its spread in China, it is not as popular as *Stray Birds* and *Crescent Moon*, because relevant studies are less. The English version of *Gitanjali* is not as rhyming as the original Bengali version, but as a world-renowned work, the English version is worth exploring and reading. Due to limited length, the paper only makes a simple comparison between Bing Xin’s translation and Bai Kaiyuan’s translation of *Gitanjali* based on corpus, and there is still a large space for further study in such regards as the rhythm of *Gitanjali* and the differences in various translations.

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