The Origin of Four-Character Structures with *er* (而) in Literary Translation from English into Chinese: A Descriptive Study of *A Passage to India*

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Four-character structures in Chinese are commonly discussed as tools of embodying the aesthetic properties of both oral and written literature works. The use of four-character structures in the Chinese translated texts could have the same function, and it is not hard to find in the Chinese translations of English literature works that four-character structures are largely adopted. Through collecting four-character structures with *er* (而) from a translated work of *A Passage to India*, and investigating on their origins in the source English text, this thesis uses statistic methods to induce some linguistic properties on the counterparts. From the perspective of analyzing those counterparts which correspond to the Chinese four-character structure translations, certain characteristics or properties are discovered, and inspirations on literary translation techniques are provided. Some discussions are also made concerning possible relations between the four-character structures with *er* (而) and their ST counterparts.

Keywords: four-character structures with *er* (而), translation origins, literary translation, adaptation theory, salience

1. Introduction

Four-character structures is a unique linguistic phenomenon that exists in Chinese but not in English, it is even a typical language phenomenon that could be frequently found in both oral and written Chinese texts. The four-character structures, or sometimes being referred to as four-character phrases, frequently occur in general Chinese texts, classical Chinese essays and, especially, Chinese literature works. To a great extent, four-character structures in Chinese texts increase the aesthetic value of an essay or a literary work. This kind of aesthetic value is somehow emerged from the native speaker's literature appreciation experiences on ancient Chinese literature works. Secondary school students in China who are taking compulsory Chinese classes would most likely have learned and recited essays written in classical Chinese by the celebrated scholars back in the times of ancient China. Large number of four-character structures are exist in those essays, which seems to manifest a structural aesthetic value, conveying a neat sense of writing manner in compositions. The aesthetic value carried by

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four-character structures leads to an assumption that using four-character structures in English-Chinese literary translation may have possible advantages or notable functions. Consequently, this thesis intends to find out how the use of four-character structures in translations could be “predicted”, which means, to know in what situation can we consider translating certain English source texts into Chinese four-character structures.

2. Object of Study and Source of Corpus

When translating English texts, especially literary texts, into Chinese, a common concern would be how the Chinese translation could make the Chinese readers, as the target language readers, feel that the meanings and contents are present in a much concise, authentic and idiomatic way. This may relate to the use of four-character structures.

2.1 The Four-character Structures with er (而)

In Chinese, there are plenty of types of four-character structures. To narrow of the scope of the four-character structures, this paper selected one special type of four-character structures from the Chinese translation text, which are the four-character structures with er (而). The Chinese character er (而) is a conjunction in modern Chinese in terms of the part of speech, and it carries a variety of functions grammatically and semantically. As a conjunction, it has extremely frequent occurrence owing to its complex functions. Lu (1982) argued that the basic function of ‘而’ in Chinese could be summarized as “parallel liaison, a kind of gluing, and impassively linking” (p. 178). Basing on this it is clear that ‘而’ serves as, in the most cases, a linking conjunction which combines other elements together as a whole with its own semantic meaning. Xue (2013) in her essay suggested that, “a semantic structure would be generated with the linking provided by ‘而’; and this structure, with different parts being linked and relations being built by ‘而’, expresses a new meaning” (p. 7). The four-character structures with er (而) would therefore represent an authentic and idiomatic linguistic phenomenon in the Chinese language. Studying their counterparts in the ST and their interrelations would hopefully cast new lights on English-Chinese translation with particular relevance to literary translation.

2.2 Basic Textual Material

Firstly published in 1924, *A Passage to India* is the last full-length novel that E.M. Forster had finished before he turned his studying priorities to literature theories. As a great British novelist, poet, librettist, essayist and scholar, Edward Morgan Forster had created altogether six full-length novels during his lifetime. Among all the six outstanding works, *A Passage to India* is considered to have a much special story background and theme, the profound implications of colonial conflicts, as well as the potential language characteristics and attributes of writing styles in the story is unique and worth in-depth studying.

The selected translated version of *A Passage to India* is published by Shanghai Translation Publishing House in the year of 2016, which is translated by Feng Tao, a Chinese translator. The version is chosen mainly because that it is the latest version comparing to all those versions published decades ago. The language use of it and its target audiences would therefore much closer to the modern society.

3. Methods

3.1 Data Collection

To gather qualified materials and build a comprehensive corpus for this research, with the original texts of *Passage to India* and its selected Chinese translation version in electronic versions as the most primary and fundamental sources, the author list out all the qualified four-character structures with *er* (而) in the Chinese translation together and their English counterparts in the original novel. Considering that the four-character structures with *er* (而) are, for most of the times, conjoint to the contents around them, when picking them out of the whole text, the necessary parts were retained. An example is shown below :

TT	ST
... ...对于文学根本就是敬而远之	 they <u>left</u> literature <u>alone</u> .

As in the above table, the underlined part 敬而远之 is the target retrieved from the TT for investigation, along with its corresponding counterparts in ST, “left ... alone”.

Consequently, a complete list that contains four-character structure with *er* (而) translations and their counterparts side by side has been created, in which one could be able to explicitly extract the language materials concerned.

3.2 Data Analysis Methods

The data analysis methods of this thesis will be described as a combination of both quantitative and qualitative approaches, concretely contains the analysis of the ST part and the TT part. After that, a comparison would be made to reveal the relation between those four-character structures with *er* (而) and their translation counterparts.

For analyzing the ST Counterparts, the formation would be the very preliminary characteristic being observed. Therefore, the first step is to distribute all the English language units in accordance with their formations. The classification generated would most likely be as follows: single word, phrase comprising word and preposition, and clause. Furthermore, in order to reveal some properties of the ST counterparts, we need to go further and see whether there is a dominant property shown. So in the second step, the part of speech would serve as another criterion. Through counting the numbers of verbs (or verb phrases), nouns, adjectives, adverbs and so forth, it is expected to find out the dominant one or ones¹.

For analyzing four-character structures in the TT, the investigation is mainly conducted from two major aspects. Firstly, examining the proportion of idioms among all the four-character structures makes it possible to understand whether using idiom induces the use of four-character structures in English-Chinese literary translation². Secondly, according to Chinese grammarians, the basic semantic function of *er* (而) as a conjunction in the modern Chinese (and partially in the classical Chinese) is showing the relation of those different parts that are linked by it (Lu. 1982). Eight major categories of the semantic meaning of *er* (而) being a conjunction are as following: 并列、承接、递进、转折、修饰、假设、因果、目的 (parallel relation, undertaking relation, progressive

¹ For the dominant part of speech, a further step can be made to examine whether there is a subordinate level of this part of speech, some properties regarding the subordinate levels would also be explored.

² The definition of “idiom” given by *Oxford Advanced Learner’s English-Chinese Dictionary* (eighth edition, published by Oxford University Press in 2010) is “a group of words whose meaning is different from the meanings of the individual words” (p. 1042), which provides the standard for examining whether a four-character structure is used as a rather idiomatic expression.

relation, adversative relation, modifying relation, hypothetical relation, causal relationship and purpose relationship) (Gong, 2009, p. 21). By examining what semantic meanings of the character *er* (而) are predominant among all the language materials collected, results can be revealed that whether there is certain semantic meaning emerging as the most frequently occurring one in the translation. This process aims at exploring what linguistic properties regarding semantic meaning, grammatical function or idiomaticity in the TT part has been exhibited.

For analyzing and revealing the effect of the translation phenomenon, the Adaptation Theory and the concept of “salience” are borrowed as an angle for investigation. According to Verschueren (2000), in the process of translating foreign literature works into Chinese, the translator faces the issue of making choices in the use of Chinese. In this process of choice-making, the investigator puts special attention on what serves as the key factor that leads to the interpretation of the final choice, and what effects may be achieved via adopting that final choice. The investigator is strongly convinced that “not all choices... are made equally consciously or purposefully” (Verschueren, 2000, p. 66) and the language user could always make choices to produce language in a way they feel most adequate in several situations. As the “choices” mentioned in this thesis—the four-character structures with *er* (而) could actually be replaced by several other types of language choices, conducting translation comparisons is necessary to see how alternative “choices” will result differently in translation products in lieu of the four-character structures with *er* (而).

4. Results and Analysis

4.1 The Outcome of the Data Analysis regarding the Translation Counterparts in the ST

After analyzing the translation counterparts in the ST, the statistic result was provided first to give an overview on the distribution regarding the part of speech of the ST counterparts. The overall quantity distribution of each type of counterparts are tabulating in the chart below:

Table 1

Results in Terms of Part of Speech

ST counterparts of four-character structures	Quantity
verbs & verb phrases	90
nouns/adjectives/adverbs	14
prepositions	13
subordinate clauses	3
omission terms	9
Total	129

The preliminary result that could be seen from the data statistics is that they basically comprise words, phrases and clauses (short sentences). The absolute predominant type among the whole ST counterparts appears to be the word/phrase category. The total number of ST counterparts corresponding to four-character structures with ‘而’ (*er*) in the TT is 129. Among them, 117 terms belong to the category of “word/phrase”. As for the rest 12 terms, 3 terms of them are subordinate clauses, while the other 9 terms belong to a special type of translation counterpart, which is the “blank” counterpart, or being regarded as the “omission term”.

The “omission term” phenomenon is basically resulted from the additional translation method adopted by the translator. After retrieving those 9 four-character structures from the TT, it is unable to target a direct counterpart of any of them in the ST. In other words, their counterparts are simply “blank”. As the examples below, the “()” symbol represents for the omission term as we labeled:

Table 2

“omission” Terms

TT	“omission” counterparts in the ST
不过对于 <u>从天而降</u> 的好运气，她并没有表现得兴高采烈。	But she accepted her () good luck without enthusiasm.
渐渐消融在热带海洋 <u>蒸腾而起</u> 的雾气当中。	melted into the () haze of a tropic sea.
一支火箭焰火从监狱的花园里 <u>腾空而起</u> ，发出了信号。	A rocket () from the Jail garden gave the signal.

Table 3

“subordinate clauses” Terms

TT	subordinate clauses counterparts
“ <u>总而言之</u> ，长话短说吧，	“ <u>The long and the short of it is ...</u> ...
阿黛拉不禁想起 <u>先她而来</u> 的那些年轻男女，	Adela thought of the young men and women <u>who had come out before her</u> ,
可是全部事实 <u>仅此而已</u> 吗？	But <u>was that all</u> ?

There are merely 3 terms of the ST counterparts are in the form as subordinate clauses.

By now the fact is proved that the predominant type among all 129 ST counterparts is “word/phrase”. The result shows that the proportion of “verbs & verb phrases” category is dramatically higher than other categories among all the ST counterparts. To be precisely, the number of counterparts of four-character structures with er (而) pertaining verbs or verb phrases amount to 90 among all the terms (as illustrated in table 1). Some typical examples below could be helpful to give a direct observation on the verbs and verb phrases found in the ST.

Example (1)

TT: 除非是应邀前来的客人，否则那遍地的污物会让所有的人望而却步

ST: whose filth deters all but the invited guest... (verb)

Example (2)

TT: 有一簇拳头和手指破土而出

ST: fists and fingers are thrust up through the soil (verb phrase)

Example (3)

TT: 然后大家蜂拥而出，

ST: Then they poured out, (verb)

Example (4)

TT: 她也许将与危地马拉和比利时比肩而立！

ST: she shall rank with Guatemala and Belgium perhaps! (verb phrase)

From example (1) to (4) we can observe that the “verbs and verb phrases” type appears to contain both single verbs and verb phrases (i.e. verbs with particles). Addressing the issue in a detailed way, the statistic result is that

there are 41 terms in the form of single verbs or ‘verbs plus objects’ (i.e. deters, poured out), and 49 terms in the form of verb phrase as ‘verb plus particle’ (i.e. thrust up through the soil, rank with).

As the four-character structures with er (而) in the TT mainly originate from English verbs and verb phrases in the ST, basing on this finding, this thesis did a further investigation to discover the kind of verb that is most frequently found from the “verbs & verb phrases” category. In the purpose of finding a dominant category of verb, it will call for a further step in the classification of the ‘verb’ category. To find the subordinate level of this category need the references for verb classifications, which serves as a criterion for a term-by-term inspection in this step. The methods of classifying English verbs had always been varied. Here the present author would borrow the verb classification method from the Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary (Oxford University Press, 1989), which is simple and easily operated, had subsumed English verbs into two broad categories, transitive verb (vt.) and intransitive verb (vi.). Under this guidance, the altogether 90 verb terms will be distribute to subcategories. The result of respectively counting the number of transitive verb and intransitive verb shows as follows:

Table 4

Dominance of Intransitive Verbs

“verb & verb phrase” terms	90 out of 129
intransitive verbs	64 out of 90
transitive verbs	26 out of 90

To give a brief discussion on the findings of ST part analysis. The first conclusion is that using four-character structures with er (而) in the translation is mainly for translating English verbs. And according to the predominant proportion of intransitive verbs in the ST counterparts. It seems to reveal that four-character structures with er (而) could be adopted as a useful method to translate English intransitive verbs. This result is drawn from one single translation sample, but even so it provides a hint that it is possible to consider using four-character structures with er (而) to solve some translation issues regarding the verbs that are difficult to deal with. When encountered the situation that an English verb or verb phrase cannot be translated smoothly into Chinese, the result from this chapter suggests that four-character structures with er (而) could be used for address the issue.

4.2 The Outcome of the Data Analysis Regarding the Translations in the TT

Regarding the properties of the four-character structures in the TT, the second aspect we are trying to study on is the semantic relations of the character er (而). Given the eight types of semantic relations (see 3.2) of the character er (而), four of them has been discovered in our TT data, which are undertaking relation, adversative relation, parallel relation, and modifying relation (承接关系、转折关系、并列关系 和 修饰关系). Among the four types of relations, statistic result shows that the undertaking and modifying relations (承接、修饰关系) take the major ground regarding the use of the four-character structures with er (而) in the translation, among which modifying relation appears to contain 79 terms, while 36 terms belong to the undertaking relation. Parallel relation and adversative relation respectively contain 7 terms. The modifying relation (修饰关系) serves as the predominant one among others.

Table 5

Quantity Distribution of Semantic Relations of er (而)

Undertaking relation 承接关系 (36 个)	i.e. 相对而言/生而为人 etc.
Parallel relation 并列关系 (7 个)	i.e. 老而又老/显而易见 etc.
Adversative relation 转折关系 (7 个)	i.e. 视而不见/不治而愈/不寒而栗 etc.
Modifying relation 修饰关系 (79 个)	i.e. 喷涌而出/腾空而起/鱼贯而出 etc.

According to Gong (2009), the modifying semantic relation (修饰关系) of *er* (而) plays the role of giving descriptions on certain movements. The use of this semantic relation in the translating process will thus make the movements and actions more vividly when being read by Chinese readers. Likewise, some typical examples are also provided below for elaborating on this finding:

Example (10)

TT: 朝官署驻地飞驰而去 (修饰关系 modifying relation)

ST: towards the civil lines, with a vivid sense of speed.

Example (11)

TT: 虽然在当时对这一切她全都视而不见。(转折关系 adversative relation)

ST: though she had been blind to it at the time.

Example (12)

TT: 这其实是个老而又老的问题, (并列关系 parallel relation)

ST: the old, old trouble that

Example (13)

TT: 揽辔休息时两人更是相视而笑、莫逆于心。(承接关系 undertaking relation)

ST: and smiled when they drew rein to rest

In example (10), the translator used the term “飞驰而去” to translate “with a vivid sense of speed”. Apart from being very idiomatic by using this four-character structure, the readability has also been improved as the language use is not plain. Besides that, the meaning is conveyed in a terse manner. By adopting a modifying morpheme “飞驰” before the action of “去”, the translation text readers are basically receiving the exactly same meaning as the foreign readers of the source text novel. Similar uses of the modifying relation of *er* (而) accumulate to 76 terms throughout the translation.

By using the four-character structures with *er* (而), as well as using the two main semantic meanings of the character *er* (而), the English intransitive verbs are translated in a smooth and authentic way. It is therefore suggested that using four-character structures with *er* (而) could be a useful option for literary translation, aiming at achieving an idiomatic and authentic effect.

4.3 The Outcome of the Data Analysis Regarding the Relation between Translations in the TT and Counterparts in the ST

According to Verschueren (2000), the use of language is a process of language user's continuous choices-making, and this process is based on three properties of language: variability, negotiability and adaptability. While the property of adaptability serves as a key factor in the process of adapting when using language. Verschueren further argued (2000) that the notion of adaptability will ... enable to assign four clear tasks to pragmatic descriptions and explanations. One of those angles of investigations is the salience of the

adaptation processes. The translation, when considered as a choice-making activity in languages, will take different levels of consciousness. Saliency is “the general cover term we use to designate the status of processes of meaning generation in relation to the medium of adaptability” (Verschueren, 2000, p. 173).

Consider the translation as a process of using the target language to express the meanings in the source text, the four-character structures translations can be regarded as a result of choice made by the translator. Through the investigation, the present author has discovered that the use of four-character structures with er (而) as translation products give a variety of saliency in the TT, which provides better reading experience and understanding for the target readers. Some typical cases would be examined in detail as the following:

Case 1:

ST	TT (translator's choice)	possible alternatives	degree of saliency
they <u>burst out of</u> stifling purlieus and unconsidered temples	从窒闷的贫民窟和荒僻的庙宇中 <u>拔地而起</u>	(1) 从窒闷的贫民窟和荒僻的庙宇中 <u>耸立出来</u> (2) 从窒闷的贫民窟和荒僻的庙宇中 <u>建立起来</u>	Recognition of written genre

As clearly being put in the table above, the present author has provided two alternative translations other than using four-character structures with er (而). Investigating from the angle of saliency, conclusion can be drawn that the translator's choice of using four-character structures (in this case, 拔地而起) is much more authentic for the written literature genre. While if we adopt the alternative translations as 耸立出来 or 建立起来, although the basic meaning is not modified, the sense of aesthetic value will somehow be washed away.

The adoption of four-character structures with er (而) has also be helpful for providing a neat and concise content for the Chinese translation text. Refer to the example below:

Case 2:

ST	TT (translator's choice)	possible alternatives	degree of saliency
was that the elder lady <u>accepted her own apathy</u>	老夫人坦然接受自己的心无所感, <u>随遇而安</u>	(1) 老夫人坦然接受自己的心无所感, <u>接受这份冷淡</u> (2) 老夫人坦然接受自己的心无所感, <u>淡然承受下来</u>	Recognition of representation

The underlined part of the ST text is a verb phrase. Through literal translation, as in alternative translation 1), the dealing method is somehow wordy. While comparing to the translator's choice of using four-character structures (in this case, 随遇而安), the TT text seems neat and more applicable to the reading habit of target readers.

According to the two cases above, the investigator also sets out to argue that the result of translating the ST counterparts into Chinese four-character structures is basing on the degrees of saliency of the translator through the translating process. The translator has to decide what type of content should be salient in his or her translation output. As we take the four-character structures with er (而) as a translation phenomenon to be studied, the saliency emerged from that phenomenon is typically investigated, the use of four-character structures with er (而) in the translation can be observed from the angle of saliency. It can be seen that alternative translations other than four-character structures with er (而) are used in the translation, through a comparison, certain effects are achieved through using four-character structures with er (而) to translate the ST.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

As simple and neat it is, the four-character structure is always in the form of constituting four characters. From the phonology point of view, in written texts this kind of structure provides an aesthetic value for readers. Li (2003) argues that “the aesthetic value of four-character structures in terms of English-Chinese translations mainly shows in four aspects: the tone shows a rhythmic sense of beauty; the regular form sense of beauty; contents show a sense of beauty in terms of imagery, and the concise sense of beauty in the writing style” (p. 161). The aesthetic value, in this case, brings target readers a sense of appreciating when reading the literature works translated from foreign languages into Chinese.

Another critical element, regarding literature translation, would be that making the translation authentic to target readers. For most of the times, this requirement of authenticity is closely related to the organization of language. Chinese is an analytic language, which tends to be concise and differs a lot from English. Its writing manner of neatness and conciseness contributes a lot to the reading experience of readers. It is rather noticeable that being neat and clear does not mean being simple and plain. The content and necessary imageries should always be properly delivered in the text. Basing on these two aspects of requirements, when translating English literature works into Chinese, the adoption of four-character structures with er (而) provides a much useful way to address the issue.

To sum up, the special type of four-character structure makes it possible to express complex meanings in neat and short forms. With the character er (而) in the four-character structures, the meaning it can carry will then be abundant. Basing on that, when it comes to translating English intransitive verbs into Chinese, four-character structures with er (而) provides a useful solution.

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