

Rovira-Esteva, Sara. (2005) "What do we leave behind when failing to translate a "Chinese Dead Metaphor?". A: Branchadell, Albert; West, Margaret (eds). *Less Translated Languages*, Amsterdam/ Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 237-254.

Abstract

Almost everyone agrees that the mastering of Chinese measure words is a difficult point within the teaching and learning of Chinese. But what seems to be even more challenging is grasping and accurately translating them into other languages. The fact that they do not exist as an independent category in Western grammars probably explains why linguists have neglected them for so many years. We also believe that the different linguistic approaches used so far have failed in providing satisfactory data relevant to translation purposes. Nowadays, there are three facts jeopardizing good translation practices concerning Chinese measure words, namely, the widespread belief that they are unique to Chinese and thus cannot be translated into Western languages, the habit of providing only one word in a foreign language for a given Chinese measure word, as if there was a fixed linguistic equivalent, and the idea that they are redundant. From our point of view, these approaches are too simplistic, but unfortunately are too common. Just recently a few works highlighting their importance have been published. These completely new approaches to this linguistic phenomenon are promising, since they set up the basis for a more holistic approach, including all levels of language and aspects related to discourse, instead of a mere morphological, useless phenomenon. In this paper we will show with numerous examples in Catalan and English how measure words are used in Chinese discourse and why more attention should be paid to them, both in teaching and in translating.