

## **How Cognitive Grammar Can Be Used to Compare *Ge Sa-er Wang* and Its English Translation?**

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### ABSTRACT

By creating a parallel corpus of thirteen stories from 《格薩尔王》 *Ge Sa-er Wang* “*King Ge Sa-er*” and their English translations, this article seeks to explore the meaning of culture-specific world-builders from reading the translation. World-builders point to such elements as locations, characters, and objects; they play a significant role in constructing text-words which represent people’s understanding of a text. To examine the meaning of culture-specific world-builders, this research draws on the concept of “domain” from Cognitive Grammar. A domain is defined as any type of concept, and a set of domains together form the meaning of an item. The results of this article reveal that the use of an equivalent word to translate a culture-specific world-builder does not guarantee an equivalent meaning of this world-builder in the translation. Instead, the meaning of this world-builder in the English translation is determined by the construction of the domains of a culture-specific world-builder in that version. The key contribution of this research is the new perspective that it provides on the use, and importance, of domains in meaning construction in translation studies.

KEYWORDS: Cognitive Grammar, culture-specific world-builders, meaning construction, domains, *Ge Sa-er Wang*, translation of ethnic minority literature

### **1. Introduction**

Cognitive Grammar, one of the cognitive approaches developed within the discipline of cognitive linguistics, has been introduced systematically by Ronald Wayne Langacker (1987,

*Yuqiao Zhou, Hazlina Abdul Halim, Diana Abu Ujum, Wong Ling Yann, How Cognitive Grammar Can Be Used to Compare Ge Sa-er Wang and Its English Translation? 1-24*

1991, 2002, 2007, 2008, 2009). Cognitive Grammar explains how people interpret words, clauses, and sentences. Cognitive Grammar is an important linguistic approach in meaning analysis; this approach has been employed by many scholars to explore meaning construction in the discipline of cognitive stylistics (e.g., Hamawand 2023; Hogan 2022; Giovanelli et al. 2020; Rundquist 2020; Giovanelli 2019). However, few scholars apply Cognitive Grammar to analyse meaning construction in literary translations.

Cognitive Grammar has been used to conduct meaning analysis in literary translations by two scholars: Elżbieta Tabakowska (1993, 2014) and Sandra Louise Halverson (2003). Their research demonstrates that literary translation studies can profit from Langacker's model on meaning analysis. Tabakowska is the first scholar to adopt Langacker's model to explore how the concepts from Cognitive Grammar can be used to underpin meaning construction in a translated text. Similar to many cognitive stylistic researchers, Tabakowska highlights the importance of the concept "construal" – "our manifest ability to conceive and portray the same situation in alternate ways" (2008: 43). Different from Tabakowska's research, Halverson (2003) emphasises the important role of "domains" in semantic structure while exploring the cognitive basis of translation processes. A domain points to any context or concept which contributes the construction of the fundamental meaning<sup>1</sup> of an item; a collective of domains forms a matrix of the item. Only when a person can understand the fundamental meaning of an item is he/she able to find different ways to interpret the item. Halverson highlights the importance of domains in translation, but she does not apply the concept "domain" to explore how the meaning of an item may be constructed in a translated text.

Unlike previous studies, this article draws on Langacker's concepts of matrix and domain to construct fundamental meaning of exotic, or culturally unfamiliar items in the English translation of *Ge Sa-er Wang* (Alai 2009). While reading a translated text, target readers may have no idea of the meanings of exotic words, especially of culture-specific world-builders, because even a dictionary may not be able to give their complete meaning, and indeed some exotic words created by translators may not be included in dictionaries. As a result, the

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<sup>1</sup> Langacker (2008) calls "fundamental meaning" "conceptual content". For better understanding, this research uses the term "fundamental meaning" to refer to "conceptual content".

priority for target readers is to understand the fundamental meaning of culture-specific world-builders. The concept of “world-builders” is from Text World Theory (Gavins 2007), primarily including characters, time, locations, and objects. The idea is crucial to textual meaning construction as it establishes boundaries that shape text-worlds which represent the way readers comprehend a text. Subsequently, world-builders that are peculiar to a culture refer to those that do not have equivalents in the target language.

Text World Theory is popular with scholars in the field of literary studies, but so far only a few scholars, including Lu Shao and Yuqiao Zhou (2022a, 2022b), have taken Text World Theory into translation studies. Shao and Zhou explore the translation of text-words in literary works and suggest a new approach that combines Text World Theory and Sociocognitive Discourse Studies to conduct literary translation studies. However, Shao and Zhou’s research emphasises text-world construction without analysing the meaning of world-builders which are the fundamental elements used to build a text-world. The different meaning of world-builders results in different text-worlds and different ways to interpret a text/discourse. In a translation, if the meaning of a world-builder is mis-constructed, target readers will be unable to interpret the text in the same way as source readers.

Considering the important role of world-builders in the understanding of texts, in this article, we aim to explore the meaning of culture-specific world-builders in a set of translations by gathering their domains. To achieve this aim, the research goes through four steps. Firstly, all world-builders creating the source text-world are gathered based on the parallel corpus of the 13 Ge Sa-er stories from the first chapter of *Ge Sa-er Wang* by Alai (2009) and their English translations from *The Song of King Gesar* translated by Howard Goldblatt and Sylvia Li-chun Lin (2013). Secondly, all domains of a culture-specific world-builder are analysed. Thirdly, the matrix of a culture-specific world-builder is explored by putting all domains together. Lastly, it examines whether the meaning of a culture-specific world-builder can be considered the same in the English translation as it is in source language system.

## **2. The Ge Sa-er Saga and Its English Translation**

The Ge Sa-er saga, which is the world’s longest epic (Raine 2014), narrates how the place

named Ling, present-day Kangba<sup>2</sup>, develops from a tribe into a nation and describes the origins of its religious belief in Buddhism. The Ge Sa-er saga has been handed down over more than 1000 years<sup>3</sup> and is still sung today by professional bards; the saga is listed as “Intangible Cultural Heritage” by UNESCO. The Ge Sa-er legend is popular with various Chinese ethnic minority groups ranging from Tibetans, Mongolians, the Tu to the Naxi (Wang and Wang 2011). It has taken many forms in China: oral folk tale, folk song, Thangka (a painting on a wall or cloth), xylograph, and printed books. In addition, many other *Ge Sa-er* forms were introduced in India, Nepal, Bhutan, Sikkim, and Kalmykia and Buryatia of the former Soviet Union. The descriptions given by explorers, and the translations based on existing versions have made the Ge Sa-er saga known by readers around the world.

The saga was first introduced to the European world in the 18th century by Peter Simon Pallas who mentioned King Ge Sa-er in his report *Journey through various provinces of the Russian Empire (Reise durch verschiedene Provinzen des Russischen Reichs)* in German. This report was published in three volumes between 1771 to 1776. Later, other explorers (e.g., von Bergmann 1804; David-Neel 1927) and a few translations by Isaac Jacob Schmidt (1839) and Grigory Nikolayevich Potanin (1893) contributed to the introduction of the saga to readers in European countries.

Following the introduction in European countries, the first mention of the Ge Sa-er saga in Anglophone world was in the twentieth century when Francke (1905), a theologian, made a description of the Ge Sa-er legend in his book, *A Lower Ladakhi Version of Kesar Saga*, with seven chapters including the Tibetan original text, English abstracts, and introductions. Then, some English translations (e.g., Zeitlin 1927; Wallace, 1991; Penick 1996; Wang, Zhu, and Han 2009; Goldblatt and Lin 2013) help introduce the saga to Anglophone readers. Among them, the translation published in 2013 by Goldblatt and Lin is the latest English version. It is translated based on Alai’s *Ge Sa-er Wang* (2009).

This article conducts a case study on Alai’s Ge Sa-er version and its English translation, *The*

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<sup>2</sup> Five Chinese Tibetan areas are inhabited by Tibetan minorities: Anduo, Weizang, Jiarong, Kangba and Gongbu.

<sup>3</sup> By the early eleventh century CE, many versions of the Ge Sa-er saga had been spread orally.

*Song of King Gesar*, due to the following three reasons. Firstly, the work by Alai (2009) is the first Ge Sa-er version which serves as an original text to be translated into many different languages; it has been translated into six other languages. Secondly, *The Song of King Gesar* by Goldblatt and Lin (2013) is the first English version which has a native English language translator and whose source text (ST) is originally finished by a writer rather than a translator. Some other English translations are either produced by employing existing translations as source texts (e.g., Zeitlin 1927; Wallace 1991; Penick 1996) or by non-English native speakers (e.g., Wang, Zhu, and Han, 2009), whereas Goldblatt and Lin translate the Ge Sa-er version originally accomplished by Alai. Lin is a native source language speaker and Goldblatt is a native target language speaker. Arguably, this cooperation helps both the interpretation of the Chinese text and the formulation of the English version. Thirdly, the ST and target text (TT) are of high quality because both the writer and the translators are highly skilled and recognised in the field of literature and literary translation respectively. The writer, Alai, is a celebrated Tibetan Chinese writer, who won the Maodun Literature Prize in 2000 and the Luxun Literature Prize in 2018. These two prizes are among the most important literary awards in China. In 2015, he was nominated for the Nobel Prize in Literature. The translators, Goldblatt and Lin are highly regarded scholars in the field of Chinese to English literature translation. They won National Translation Prize in 2000, awarded by American Literary Translators Association for literary translators' outstanding contribution. Goldblatt has translated more than 80 Chinese novels, including the works of Mo Yan who won the Nobel Prize in Literature in 2012.

In this article, Alai's version of the Ge Sa-er saga and its English version will be compared with the aim of exploring how the meanings of culture-specific world-builders are translated. Methodologically, it will draw on Langacker's (2008) concepts of matrix and domain, which explain the way to form fundamental and objective meaning of items.

### **3. A Pilot Study of the Matrix in Text-Worlds**

#### *3.1 Cognitive Grammar in meaning analysis*

Langacker's (1987, 1991, 2008) Cognitive Grammar explains the way people construct the meaning of expressions and grammatical features. Langacker (1987) highlights the importance of domains in meaning construal, and he (1991) insists that people can employ

*Yuqiao Zhou, Hazlina Abdul Halim, Diana Abu Ujum, Wong Ling Yann, How Cognitive Grammar Can Be Used to Compare Ge Sa-er Wang and Its English Translation? 1-24*

alternative ways to comprehend the same fundamental meaning. According to Langacker (2008), the linguistic meaning of an expression is constructed by evoking related domains; the linguistic meaning of an item comprises its fundamental meaning and the way to explain the fundamental meaning (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Meaning construction

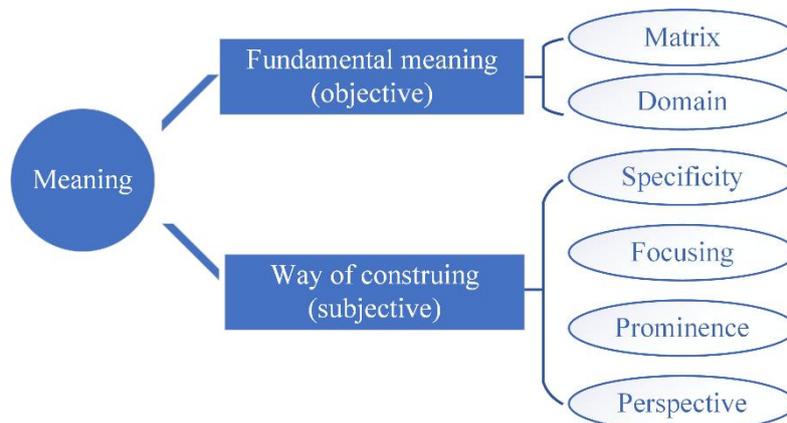


Figure 1 shows the general way of meaning construction based on Cognitive Grammar. A domain carries out the annotation of “any kind of conception or realm of experience” (Langacker 2008: 44). Cognitive Grammar takes the item “domain” to describe linguistic meaning, with the aim of providing a uniform explanation of fundamental meaning. Domains can be basic and non-basic depending on whether they are irreducible or not. Non-basic domains are cognitively reducible, and most domains are non-basic ones. The amount of irreducible basic domain is limited and few expressions “lend themselves to being directly and solely described in terms of basic domains or a putative set of primitive concepts” (Langacker 2008: 46). The matrices of most culture-specific world-builders are not complex due to limited domains the translated text introduces.

When a linguistic meaning is processed, it normally evokes a set of domains, and this set of domains serves as its conceptual matrix. A matrix is regarded as basic meaning of an item (Langacker 2008). Domains of a matrix are open-ended, and they follow a centrality to periphery rule, which indicates the level of a domain’s importance. Compared with peripheral domains, the central ones play a more important role in the explanation of an item’s fundamental meaning. Language patterns and contexts define which domains are active at a

given time. For example, when an item points to multiple entities, different central domains will be activated for that particular item.

The relationship between a matrix and a domain is complex. A matrix can shift into a domain, and vice versa. For example, the construal of an enactor evokes its related world-builders: locations, objects, and other related enactors. The matrix of an enactor serves as a prototype of his/her/its domain's features; conversely, a domain can project a matrix. The concepts of domain and matrix explain an item's fundamental meaning. Although we may be able to evoke fundamental meaning in a kind of neutral manner "at the conceptual level", when we interpret it "linguistically", we are likely to understand the same fundamental meaning in alternative ways (Langacker 2008: 43). The alternative ways demonstrate people's subjectivity in meaning construal, which is influenced by such factors as specificity, focusing, prominence, and perspective.

### *3.2 The importance of interpreting world-builders*

World-builders are the "building blocks" readers use to establish conceptual representations of discourse in their minds (Gavins 2007, 36). World-builders are the fundamental elements that set boundaries to build text-worlds which represent people's cognitive processes while interpreting a text during reading, according to Text World Theory (Werth 1999; Gavins 2007; Stockwell 2019). Different world-builders construct different text-worlds and thus result in a different comprehension of a text.

World-builders mainly include spatiotemporal parameters, objects, and enactors.

Spatiotemporal parameters set boundaries to a text-world by specifying the time and place, while enactors and objects provide information on the relationship between these parameters. Enactors refer to various versions of an individual or character that "[exist] at different conceptual levels of a discourse" (Gavins 2007: 41). For instance, *Ge Sa-er Wang* depicts many different enactors of Ge Sa-er, who initially takes the form of a white four-headed marmot but is reborn as a deity. Later, Ge Sa-er is again reborn, this time as a human in the earth world. All these different forms and versions of Ge Sa-er are his various enactors.

Many world-builders in *Ge Sa-er Wang* are culture-specific items which exclusively exist in

the source language, such as 普萨 *Pusa* “Bodhisattva”, 龙宫 *long-gong* “the Dragon Palace”, and 佛光 *foguang* “the Buddhist light”. Culture-specific items are the epithets specially existing in the source language or target language. Culture-specific items involve more than linguistic meaning (Conway 2012). They also contain underlying cultural meaning, and their cultural meaning challenges translators. Meanwhile, lack of counterparts in the target language is another difficulty translators face. As culture-specific items bring difficulties to translators, many scholars explore the different translation procedures of culture-specific items (e.g., Dickins 2012; Olk 2013; Narváez and Zambrana 2014; Marco 2019; Turzynski-Azimi 2021). However, the meaning construction of the translation of a culture-specific item seems to be neglected in translation studies. How a translated version facilitates the meaning construction of a source culture-specific item is crucial in understanding the translation as a whole. This is particularly true when the culture-specific items are world-builders, in which case the meaning construction becomes even more crucial as world-builders create text-worlds to comprehend the translated version. Due to the important role of culture-specific world-builders in the comprehension of the translation, this research focuses on the meaning construction of culture-specific world-builders.

### *3.3 The fundamental meaning of world-builders*

When readers process the domain of a world-builder, their matrix of this world-builder is evoked. The interpretation of a world-builder may also evoke the matrices of other world-builders if they have a common or similar domain. For instance, in *Ge Sa-er Wang*, the matrix of a world-builder connects that of enactors, objects and spatiotemporal parameters. When an enactor is introduced, the place where he/she lives (spatiotemporal items) and the objects he/she usually uses may be depicted, too. His/her relationship with other enactors may also be illustrated. As a result, the relationship of an enactor’s matrix and domain can be represented by the following formula:

Matrix (an enactor) = Image domain + Typical action domain + Related enactors  
domain + Related objects domain + Typical group domain +  
Location domain + Domain of typical episode (sometimes  
in a book or a television program)

Some target readers may have knowledge of the source culture, so they may build the matrix of a culture-specific world-builder via a combination of the translation and their own knowledge. However, for the target readers who have no knowledge of the source myth, they may need to interpret the meaning of a culture-specific world-builder by comprehending all domains the translation involves; and the way they form the meaning of a culture-specific world-builder depends largely on the episodes in the TT. They may establish domains one by one based on the episodes related to this world-builder in the text and finally create a matrix to be its meaning. In this way, it is important to provide adequate domains to explain the meaning of a culture-specific world-builder.

This research takes the term “matrix” to point to a set of domains built to form the meaning of a culture-specific world-builder in the English translation, but the matrix may not be its basic meaning, as illustrated in Extract (1) and Figure (2).

Extract (1).

On her way to Glingkar, Metog Lhartse saw a white cloud in the south-west, on which sat Master Lotus. ‘Virtuous and blessed woman,’ Master Lotus said. ‘Heaven would like to borrow your noble body that you may give birth to a hero who will save Glingkar. No matter what hardship you encounter in the future, you must hold fast and believe that your son will be the king of Glingkar. He may be a stern deity to the demons, but to the black-haired Tibetans, he will be their brave and wise king.’ (Alai 2013: 38)

Extract (1) is taken from the English translation, describing Ge Sa-er’s relationships with Metog Lhartse, Tibetans in Glingkar, and demons. Extract (1) consists of six enactors: Metog Lhartse, Master Lotus, Metog Lhartse’s son - Ge Sa-er, Heaven, the demons, and the black-haired Tibetans in Glingkar. In addition, the object, a white cloud, is mentioned and three spatiotemporal parameters are involved, including *on her way to Glingkar*, *Glingkar* and *in the future*. In Extract (1), *Heaven* refers to a group of deities living there, so it can be viewed as an enactor rather than a spatiotemporal item. Although, the name of Metog Lhartse’s son is not mentioned in Extract (1), readers can infer from the context that Metog Lhartse’s son points to Ge Sa-er, and the matrix of the enactor, Ge Sa-er, covers three relationship domains

based on the expressions in Extract (1), as shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2. The matrix of Ge Sa-er in Extract (1)

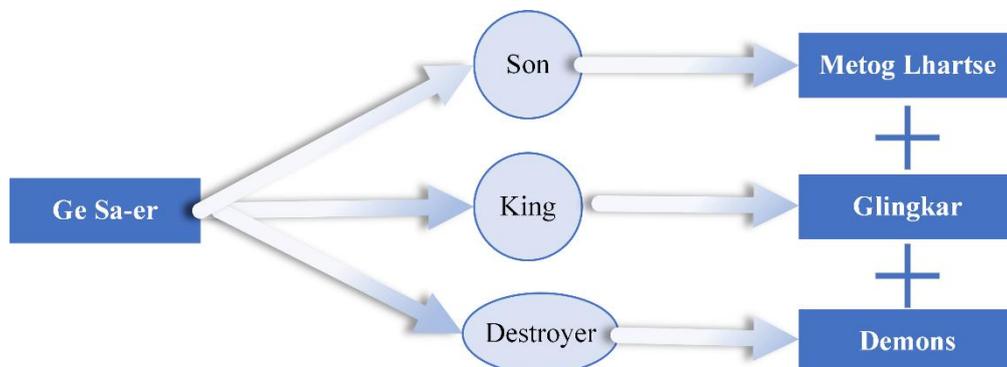


Figure 2 denotes Ge Sa-er's three relationship domains with Metog Lhartse, Tibetans in Glingkar, and demons respectively. Specifically, Ge Sa-er is the son of Metog Lhartse, the king of Tibetans in Glingkar and the person to destroy demons. The collection of the three relationship domains forms the matrix of Ge Sa-er which may not be its basic meaning, but this relationship matrix target readers build from reading Extract (1) may be evoked in the following reading to help comprehend this enactor, Ge Sa-er.

In the English version, many culture-specific world-builders are translated as exotic items to denote foreignness. The meaning of these exotic items is required to be constructed based on the text. 普萨 *Pusa*, for instance, is translated as *Bodhisattva*. The item *Bodhisattva* is from Sanskrit language rather than English language, so it conveys exoticism. The target readers who have no background knowledge of the source mythology may have no idea about the meaning of *Bodhisattva*, and they may need to interpret this item from reading the translation. The translation of the domains of *Bodhisattva*, in such instances, plays an important role in enabling target readers to form its meaning.

## 4. Research Design and Data Collection

### 4.1 Corpus design and compilation

To collect world-builders, a Chinese-English parallel corpus of the first chapter of *Ge Sa-er Wang* (Alai 2009) was created. In total, it comprises thirteen Ge Sa-er stories, made up of

*Yuqiao Zhou, Hazlina Abdul Halim, Diana Abu Ujum, Wong Ling Yann, How Cognitive Grammar Can Be Used to Compare Ge Sa-er Wang and Its English Translation? 1-24*

48,946 Chinese characters and 24,455 words in the English translation. Early in 1990, Biber’s research on corpora of linguistic features proved that a 1000-word sample is sufficient to produce a high enough level of stability for exploring linguistic features. The corpus created as part of the present research project is far larger than 1000 words and can demonstrate the linguistic features of the whole story. The first chapter covers almost all the main world-builders, so this research creates a corpus of the first chapter. The 13 Ge Sa-er stories in Chapter One explain the reason Ge Sa-er descends to the earth world, introduce Ge Sa-er’s human family after his rebirth as a human and describe his supernatural powers.

#### 4.2 Data collection: alignment and annotation of world-builders

Due to the lack of suitable corpus software for parsing the items related to world-builders, the parallel corpus of 13 Ge Sa-er stories and their English translation have been created manually. Both the ST and TT were annotated in an Excel spreadsheet, where the TT is aligned with its counterpart.

Since world-builders mainly cover spatiotemporal parameters, enactors and objects, this research annotates world-builders in the corpus accordingly (see Table 1). However, some items can be viewed as both spatiotemporal items and objects. The way to annotate these items depends on the description in the text. *Snowcapped mountains*, for instance, can be an object or a spatiotemporal item. It is listed here as an object because this item is not used as a location but, rather, as a geographical feature of Ling. *Snowcapped mountains* is therefore more likely to be an object but not a spatiotemporal item. To keep consistency, both the ST and TT annotate it as an object.

Table 1. Taxonomy of world-builders

Coarse taxonomy	Variable name	Items in the English translation
Enactor	Common	A beautiful girl, horses, people, the singers, farmers, carpenters, potters, a monk, etc.
	From the source mythology	The Supreme Deity, the Guanyin Bodhisattva, the Buddhas, Dragon, etc.
	From the target mythology	God, demons, sorceress, warlock, the gods in Heaven, spirits, etc.
Object	Common	Snowcapped mountains, bubbles, hair, the shoulders, a simple spell, thorns, medicinal herbs, etc.
	From the source mythology	Auspicious clouds, the jade steps, the Buddhist light, the sutras, his lotus seat, etc.

	From the target mythology	None.
Spatiotemporal item	Common	In caves, in the meadows, beneath the water, under the lake, a celestial kingdom, etc.
	From the source mythology	The Dragon Palace.
	From the target mythology	Heaven, demon-infested place, the Heavenly court, the gate of Heaven, etc.

Unlike the ST, which contains only the culture-specific world-builders from the source mythology, the English translation consists of culture-specific world-builders from both the source and target mythologies. For instance, Heaven is a place from the target culture rather than the source culture. Then, the Dragon Palace is a world-builder from the source mythology that is peculiar to the source culture; unfortunately, the target mythology does not describe this site. To distinguish the culture-specific world-builders from different mythologies, the world-builders are further grouped into common ones and those from the source and target mythologies, as shown in Table 1. The common world-builders are those that do not show cultural identities. Horses, for instance, can be enactors from the source or the target mythologies. The world-builders from the source mythology or the target mythology point to the items applied exclusively in the corresponding mythology. Demons, for instance, are classified as world-builders from the target mythology. Demons are regarded as evil beings who can control human bodies by causing spirit possession in medieval Christian mythology. The Christian universe is “peopled by demons”, as well as various spirits (Klaniczay and Pocs 2006: 2). Demons are different from the source evil beings with magic power, especially in terms of their generally understood appearance. Demons are typically assumed to have red skin and horns, but evil beings in the source culture usually look like humans. In the source culture, dragons symbolize power and auspiciousness; they are different from the evil winged creatures typical of western mythology. In the 13 stories, to distinguish dragons in target and source cultures, the translators capitalize the first letter of *dragon* as *Dragon*, so *Dragon* is categorized as a source world-builder.

## 5. Results and Discussion

### 5.1 World-builders in the English translation of *Ge Sa-er Wang*

Based on the parallel corpus, the total frequency of world-builders in the English translation is much fewer than in the ST (see Table 2). This can be seen to be due to two factors. On one hand, the frequencies of use of some world-builders in the TT are lower than in the ST. For

instance, the frequency of evil beings in the ST totals 264, while the total frequency is 118 in the TT. On the other hand, some world-builders are omitted directly by the TT. For example, 35 enactors of evil beings (such as 蛇魔 “snake *mo*”, 鼠魔 “mole *mo*”, and 黑风老妖 “black-wind old *yao*”) are introduced in the ST while the TT describes only 17. Less variety and less frequency result in lower numbers of world-builder items in the TT.

Table 2. The frequency of world-builders

Category	Source text	Target text	Special existence in the source culture (TT)	Special existence in the target culture (TT)
Enactor	2,432	1,594	154	121
Object	1,638	1,521	15	0
Spatiotemporal item	1,369	888	4	63
Total	5,439	4,003	173	184

Table 2 shows the frequency of world-builders in the ST, the TT, and the world-builders from the source and target culture in the TT. It demonstrates that the English version is a mix of the source and target mythologies. On one hand, the TT consists of 171 culture-specific world-builders from the source culture: 154 enactors, 15 objects and only four spatiotemporal items. It means that, in the English version, the source mythological text-world is mainly created by the enactors from the source mythology rather than spatiotemporal items. In contrast, the target mythological text-world in the TT is built by 184 world-builders, comprising 63 spatiotemporal elements and 121 enactors. Almost all spatiotemporal items in the TT are especially from the target culture, such as *Heaven* and *the Heavenly court*, even though no object in the TT is a unique existence from the target culture.

### 5.2 *The domains of culture-specific world-builders*

In the English version, 14 enactors are translated as items showing foreignness. The 14 translated enactors denote that they are from the source mythology (see Table 3). However, some enactors do not have enough domains to interpret their meaning. Amitabha, for instance, is only mentioned once in the translation, passing power to Ge Sa-er before his descent into the human world. Target readers may only know that Amitabha is a Buddha from reading the translation.

Table 3. The culture-specific world-builders from the source mythology

Item	English	Chinese	Frequency
<b>Enactor</b>	The Supreme Deity	大神	33
	Bodhisattva	菩萨	41
	Avalokitesvara	观世音菩萨	1
	Buddha(s)	佛	25
	Master Lotus	莲花生大师	35
	Amoghasiddhi	不空成就佛	1
	Vairocana	毗卢遮那佛	1
	Amitabha	阿弥陀佛	1
	Accomplished Buddhists/the Buddhists	佛国那些大成就者/佛家一路	2
	Buddhist deities	佛教所奉的神灵	1
	Dragon King	龙王	2
	Dragon daughter	龙女	6
	Shaman(s)	巫医	5
	<b>Object</b>	(Placed in the realm of the) Buddhist light	佛法(的照耀之下)
The jade steps		玉阶	3
The auspicious cloud(s)		五彩祥云	2
An eight-spoke golden wheel		八幅金轮	1
The sutras		经卷	5
The lotus of enlightenment.		智莲	1
His lotus seat		莲座	1
(Seated on) a lotus flower		(安坐于)一朵莲花(之上)	1
<b>Spatiotemporal items</b>	Dragon Palace/fortress	龙宫	4
<b>Total</b>	23 items		173

Table 3 demonstrates that Bodhisattva is mentioned most among 23 source world-builders. Bodhisattva is used to translate (观世音)菩萨 (*Guanshiyin*) *Pusa*. In the English version, 观世音菩萨 (*Guanshiyin*) *Pusa* /菩萨 *Pusa* is translated as *Guanyin Bodhisattva*, *Bodhisattva/Avalokitesvara* (Sanskrit language) and mistranslated as *Buddha* on eight occasions. Since there are many descriptions of Bodhisattva, we analyse here how the TT constructs the meaning of Bodhisattva, a source culture-specific world-builder.

In the source culture, Guanshiyin Bodhisattva is a deity who promotes fertility, enabling women to fall pregnant or ensuring that the unborn child is of the sex desired by the parents. She is also a very powerful deity, who alleviates human suffering. For some source readers, based on their knowledge of Buddhist culture rather than just on the ST, the matrix of

“Guanshiyin Bodhisattva” may be formed as follows<sup>4</sup>:

Matrix (Guanshiyin Bodhisattva) = Great power

- + Sitting on a lotus flower and hanging in the sky
- + Giving children, especially sons
- + Saving people with great mercy
- + On a cloud
- + Living in Tian
- + With a light circle in the back
- + With a willow twig inside Guanshiyin’s vase (known as 杨枝净瓶 *yangzhi jingpin*)
- + Follower of Bodhisattva’s teaching
- + Worshipped by people

Without preexisting, externally derived knowledge about Guanshiyin Bodhisattva, it is almost impossible for target readers to create the above matrix when they read this item. In other words, target readers may be assumed to fail to form the fundamental meaning of this enactor at the first occurrence. Thus, target readers establish the domains of Guanshiyin Bodhisattva by reading the episodes related to her in the translation. In the first chapter of the TT, eight domains of Guanshiyin Bodhisattva are described; these can be illustrated by the following five episodes in Table 4.

Table 4. Domains of “Guanshiyin Bodhisattva”

Episode	ST	Gloss	TT
1	这时，他还不能自由地上达天庭，但他能够上升到天庭的门口。在那里，救度苦难的观世音菩萨，等他告诉巡察岭噶遇见的种种情形。	At that time, he could not go up to the Tian Palace, but he could arrive at the door of the Tian Palace. There, <u>Guanshiyin Bodhisattva</u> , who <u>saved people from suffering</u> , waited for him to recount the things that happened in <u>Ling-ga</u> .	Although he could not travel freely into <u>Heaven</u> , he could fly up to the gate, where the <u>Guanyin Bodhisattva</u> , <u>saviour</u> of all those who <u>suffer</u> , would be waiting for his report on what he had witnessed during his journeys through <u>Gling</u> .

<sup>4</sup> The matrix is formed based on the description of Guanshiyin Bodhisattva in such research as Beibei Zhang et al. (2022), Yuhang Li (2012), and Eva Zhang (2011).

2	“他们就是那菩萨所崇教义的信徒，他们就是来把菩萨的教法传布给我们！”	“They are the <u>followers</u> of the <u>religious doctrines</u> held by <u>Bodhisattva</u> , and they come here to <u>preach Bodhisattva’s doctrines</u> to us.”	“They are <u>followers of the Bodhisattva</u> and have come to spread <u>Buddha’s teachings</u> .”
3	菩萨笑着挥挥手，就见虚空之蓝变成了水波之蓝，荡漾的涟漪间，一朵朵硕大的莲花浮现，直开到他的脚前。	When <u>Bodhisattva</u> waved her hand with a smile, the blue <u>borderless space</u> turned into blue water waves among which huge great <u>lotus flowers</u> appeared and grew one by one until they reached her foot.	The <u>Bodhisattva</u> smiled and waved, turning the void into rippling blue water, from which emerged enormous <u>water lilies</u> , one after another, until they formed a path at the <u>monk’s</u> feet.
4	菩萨说完，转过身去，踩一朵粉红祥云飘然进了天庭高大的阙门……	After <u>Bodhisattva</u> finished speaking, she turned around and stepped on a pink <u>xiangyun</u> to float into the tall gate of <u>Tian Palace</u> .	The <u>Bodhisattva</u> turned and passed through the celestial gate on a pink, <u>auspicious cloud</u> .
5	观世音菩萨从那光中显现，他悬空安坐于一朵莲花之上。	...and <u>Guanshiyin Bodhisattva</u> appeared <u>within that light</u> where she sat on a <u>lotus flower</u> hanging in the sky.	...and <u>Guanyin Bodhisattva</u> appeared in the light, seated on a <u>lotus flower</u> .

In Table 4, Episode 1 shows where Guanshiyin Bodhisattva lives, her relationship with humans. Guanshiyin Bodhisattva lives in Heaven. The relationship between Guanshiyin Bodhisattva and the people in Ling-ga is that she takes care of people in Ling-ga. She is a deity 救度苦难 *jiudu kunan* “rescuing people from suffering and difficulties”. The description that Guanshiyin Bodhisattva waits for someone to report the latest situation of Ling-ga shows her concern for the people of Ling-ga.

Episode 2 explains that there are ordinary people in the earth world who follow Bodhisattva’s teachings. However, due to the mistranslation of Bodhisattva as Buddha, the translation only conveys the idea that Guanshiyin Bodhisattva has her followers. Episode 3 shows Bodhisattva’s power to change the air into water, and her special control of the lotus. Episode 4 illustrates her ability to ride clouds up into the Tian Palace. Episode 5 shows the object that Guanshiyin Bodhisattva sits on, which is a lotus flower. It also describes her posture when seated on the lotus flower and hanging in the sky. The parallel corpus demonstrates that 悬空安坐于一朵莲花之上 “sitting on a lotus flower and hanging in the sky” is translated as *seated on a lotus flower*. Although it depicts the object that Guanshiyin Bodhisattva sits on, the item 悬空 *xuankong* “hanging in the sky”, which plays a significant role in the source myth, is omitted. *Xuankong* conveys that Tibetan deities can fly, stand and sit in the sky. In

*Yuqiao Zhou, Hazlina Abdul Halim, Diana Abu Ujum, Wong Ling Yann, How Cognitive Grammar Can Be Used to Compare Ge Sa-er Wang and Its English Translation? 1-24*

addition, Episode 5 also reveals that Bodhisattva appears in the light. Altogether, the matrix created by the translated version is as follows:

- Matrix (Guanshiyin Bodhisattva) = Sitting on a lotus flower and hanging in the sky
- + Caring for the lives in *Ling Ga*
  - + Living in **Heaven**
  - + A **saviour** of people in difficulties
  - + Emerging with light
  - + Follower of Bodhisattva's teaching
  - + Giving signs to Ling
  - + Strong power and special power to control lotus

The matrix of Guanshiyin Bodhisattva in the TT shows that its meaning is not entirely the same as its original one. In Episode 1, the spatiotemporal item 天庭 “Tian Palace” is translated as *Heaven*, which is not the place where Guanshiyin Bodhisattva lives; this translation impedes target readers' construction of an image of Guanshiyin Bodhisattva. Meanwhile, in the domain of alleviating people's suffering described in Episode 1, *jiudu kunan* is translated as *saviour of those who suffer*. Although *saviour* could be applied to describe a person who rescues somebody or something from a perilous situation or difficulties, *the Saviour* is “used in the Christian religion as another name for Jesus Christ” (Hornby 2004, 1543). The location domain and typical behavior domain of Guanshiyin Bodhisattva obviously pertain to a different culture, and they will result in a different matrix of Guanshiyin Bodhisattva. In this way, target readers fail to form an equivalent meaning of Guanshiyin Bodhisattva to that formed by readers in the source culture system.

From the translation of Guanshiyin Bodhisattva, we can see that exotic items are used to show source cultural features, but the explanation of Bodhisattva in the TT is nonetheless not the same as that in the ST. This inequivalence in the matrices presented by the ST and TT results from the decision by the English-language translators to use terms that are culturally specific to the target culture when translating terms that are culturally specific to the source culture. The matrix of Guanshiyin Bodhisattva demonstrates that a target culture-specific world-builder may change the meaning of an item when the world-builder is contained in the

matrix of the item. For instance, as mentioned above, the target culture-specific world-builder *Heaven* influences the meaning construction of Guanshiyin Bodhisattva who lives in Tian rather than Heaven. Then, take the object *the jade steps* for example, due to the translation of *Tian* as *Heaven*, the meaning of *the jade steps* is also changed as follows:

Matrix (the jade steps) = The celestial court in Heaven has jade steps

The matrix of *the jade steps* shows that it is the court in Heaven that is the one that is constructed by using jade steps. The frequency of *the jade step(s)* totals three in the corpus, and the three episodes contribute to one domain that the court in Heaven has many jade steps; it is different from the domain in the ST. The ST creates the domain that many steps in Tian Palace are jade ones. The domain of the jade steps in the TT and the ST are distinguished by the world-builder *Heaven*. Stated otherwise, applying a target culture-specific world-builder will affect not just how this item is understood, but also how other objects whose domains use this world-builder are understood.

An item's meaning may resemble that of the ST if its domains do not include world-builders peculiar to the target culture. The corpus indicates that no target culture-specific item is included in the matrix of the lone exotic spatiotemporal item "the Dragon Palace". The total frequency of *the Dragon Palace/fortress* is four, which consists of two domains as follows.

Matrix (the Dragon Palace/fortress) = Inhabited by Dragon clan, including Dragon King  
and Metog Lhartse, a Dragon daughter of Dragon  
King  
+ Having a crystal gate

The matrix of *the Dragon Palace* in the TT shows that it is a place where Dragon clan lives, and its gate is a crystal one. The two domains in the meaning construction of *the Dragon Palace* do not include target culture-specific world-builders, and the matrix is the same as the matrix in the ST.

The present focus on this neglected area of translation studies has allowed us to analyse the

meaning of world-builders that determine what kind of text-world can be built. Text-worlds represent the way people comprehend a text. That is to say, different meanings of world-builders will result in a different understanding of the translation. When the text-worlds created in the TT are distinct from the text-worlds in the ST, target readers will read a story which is different from the story in the ST.

## **6. Conclusion**

Unlike traditional, linguistic approaches in translation studies which focus on the translation of the meaning of words/characters, phrases and sentences themselves, the research presented in this article explores the meaning of an item by focusing on the domains that form the fundamental, culturally contextualised meaning of this item. We argue that only adequate domains can yield the fully contextualised meaning of an item. Although one item itself is translated as an epithet to show foreignness, a mix of the source and target cultural domains, while forming a matrix of a source culture-specific world-builder, will also make the fundamental meaning of this world-builder different from the meaning in the ST. Finally, the meaning of this world-builder deviates in the TT. This article reveals the possibility for future research in translation studies to take domains in the translated text into consideration while constructing the meaning of items. Explicating the meaning of world-builders by building on Langacker's Cognitive Grammar, this article further demonstrates the possibility of integrating the concepts of Cognitive Grammar into literary translation studies, with special reference to ethnic minority literature.

Based on a corpus study of an ethnic minority myth, this article has sought to provide a clear description of culture-specific world-builders and to explore the meaning of the world-builders. However, some other questions need to be addressed. These include how target readers will interpret the culture-specific world-builders that do not have enough domains to make them readily comprehensible, and what translation procedures might be used to resolve this problem. It also raises the question of what other concepts of Cognitive Grammar or what other linguistic approaches are useful for literary translation studies. It is hoped that more related research will be conducted to facilitate the reading experience as well as communicating clear representations of foreign cultures, including foreign ethnic minority cultures.

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