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A Comparative Analysis of the Combinatorial Properties of Chinese Measure Words and Arabic Classifiers

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ABSTRACT

This comparative analysis investigates the combinatorial properties of Chinese noun measure words and Arabic classifiers exploring their semantic syntactic and cultural aspects. Chinese measure words are integral to quantifying nouns exhibiting diverse semantic alignments and syntactic patterns. In contrast, Arabic classifiers fulfill a similar role but with distinct structural variations influenced by grammatical gender and number agreement. By juxtaposing these linguistic elements, this study unveils both commonalities and disparities, offering insights into the intricate ways languages encode quantification. Through this comparative examination, we gain a nuanced understanding of linguistic diversity and cultural nuances inherent in Chinese and Arabic, enriching our comprehension of language structure and cross-linguistic communication.

INTRODUCTION

The Arabic and Chinese languages stand as distinct linguistic entities, each embodying centuries of cultural heritage and linguistic evolution. While both languages serve as vessels for human expression and communication, they diverge significantly in their linguistic structures and mechanisms for encoding meaning. One striking difference between Arabic and Chinese lies in the realm of quantification: while Chinese employs noun-measure words to quantify objects, Arabic lacks this feature, relying instead on different linguistic strategies for quantification. In Chinese, the quantification of nouns is facilitated by a rich array of noun-measure words which serve as linguistic markers for counting and specifying quantities. These measure words, with their precise semantic alignments and syntactic versatility, form an indispensable component of Chinese grammar and discourse. From the ubiquitous ‘个’ (gè) to the specialized ‘本’ (běn) for books or ‘张’ (zhāng) for flat objects, Chinese measure words offer a nuanced framework for quantifying objects and conveying subtle distinctions in meaning.

It is crucial to conduct a comprehensive study on the application of different “measure words” in the context of learning Chinese as a second language. Moreover, measure words have various applications in Chinese reading and oral communication. Therefore, understanding all uses of measure words is necessary for more efficient communication in Chinese, which is the goal of second language acquisition and learning. According to Lado (1957, p. 2), “Elements that are similar to the learner’s native language are simple for him, and those that are different are difficult for him” (Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis (CAH)). Chinese has measure words, whereas Arabic does not use “measure word + noun”; it employs different structures for quantification. Due to the cross-linguistic differences between Chinese

and Arabic, native Arabic speakers learning Chinese as a second language encounter difficulties in the application of “measure word + noun,” which aligns with the Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis.

Conversely, the Arabic language adopts a different approach to quantification, characterized by the absence of nominal quantitative words akin to Chinese measure words. Instead, Arabic relies on alternative linguistic mechanisms for quantification such as numerical adjectives and context-based inference to convey quantities and enumerate objects. This absence of nominal quantitative words in Arabic constitutes a significant difference between the two languages, with potential implications for Arabic learners of Chinese.

For Arab students learning Chinese, the absence of nominal quantitative words in Arabic poses a unique challenge. The structural differences between Arabic and Chinese become apparent when navigating the complexities of quantification in sentences. Arab learners may encounter difficulties in understanding and employing Chinese measure words within the syntactic framework of Mandarin, as these linguistic elements diverge from the familiar structures of their native language.

Considering these linguistic disparities and the challenges they pose for language learners, this comparative analysis endeavors to unravel the intricacies of Chinese noun measure words and Arabic classifiers. By exploring the semantic, syntactic, and cultural dimensions that underpin these linguistic elements, we aim to foster a deeper understanding of language structure and cross-linguistic communication. Through this exploration, we strive to facilitate greater intercultural exchange and appreciation, bridging the divide between linguistic differences.

LITERATURE REVIEW

While there is a paucity of research on the comparative

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analysis of the combinatorial properties of Chinese noun measure words and Arabic classifiers, a few scholars have touched upon this area, albeit with limited depth. The objective of this review is to consolidate existing research relevant to this field, examining studies that delve into the linguistic structures and quantification mechanisms found in both Arabic and Chinese languages. Additionally, it will explore similar studies that compare Chinese with other linguistic systems, expanding the scope of the investigation. By synthesizing this corpus of research, we aim to shed light on the relatively understudied yet significantly important intersection of Chinese noun measure words and Arabic classifiers. This endeavor seeks to facilitate a more comprehensive understanding of cross-linguistic variations in quantification systems.

Research literature and works on the acquisition of measure words in Chinese as a second language are not abundant. They mainly focus on studies in doctoral dissertations and research on students from different native language backgrounds.

Zhang (2005), In 2005, Zhang explored the acquisition process and sequence of measure words in Chinese in-depth in his study titled 'Research on the Acquisition Process of Measure Words by Foreign Students.' This study, guided by second language acquisition theory, presented the process of foreign learners acquiring Chinese measure words through individual and group case studies. It clarified the acquisition sequence of measure word subclasses and discussed acquisition strategies to evaluate the status of measure word teaching in teaching Chinese as a foreign language. Starting from detailed case studies, the article described and analyzed errors in the process of acquiring measure words and explained the reasons for errors from both intralingual and interlingual perspectives. Through large-scale survey testing and analysis of test papers, the study concluded that learners' proficiency in measuring words improves with increasing learning time. In the acquisition sequence of measure word subclasses, quantifying measure words ranked first, followed by individual measure words, action measure words, and collective measure words. Survey subjects were subject to intralingual interference from 'quantity noun' structures, leading to phenomena like rule generalization. This study holds significant implications for teaching measure words in Chinese as a second language. However, it also has some limitations, such as the simplicity of the questionnaire design for measure word learning strategies, the complexity of the language backgrounds of research subjects, and the significant differences in the difficulty of acquiring different measure words within each subclass, which require further validation of the conclusion solely based on error rate ranking.

Yang Zongxiong (2006), In 2006, Yang Zongxiong conducted a study titled 'Analysis of Errors in the Acquisition of Common Measure Words in Chinese by Thai Students,' comparing common measure words in Chinese with their counterparts in Thai. Subsequently,

through the analysis of natural language data and the distribution of questionnaires, he studied and analyzed the errors in 'Thai students' acquisition of common measure words in Chinese, summarizing their reasons. Finally, he proposed corresponding teaching strategies, emphasizing the need to strengthen the study of Chinese measure words and comparative research between Chinese and Thai, given the increasing cultural exchanges between China and Thailand.

Wang Minyuan (2007), In 2007, Wang Minyuan conducted a study titled 'Research on the Acquisition of Measure Words in Chinese as a Second Language,' starting from the perspective of teaching and distributing questionnaires to teachers and students. Through the questionnaire survey, she analyzed the problems encountered by students of different levels in acquiring Chinese measure words and summarized three points: the learning and application of extended meanings of measure words, the serious generalization phenomenon of the measure word 'ge,' and the serious confusion in the collocation of measure words with the same noun. The author suggested adopting a progressive and layered teaching method in measure word teaching to enable students to gradually understand and use Chinese measure words.

Zeng Yihua (2007), In 2007, Zeng Yihua conducted a study titled 'Error Analysis in the Learning of Chinese Measure Words by Vietnamese Students,' focusing on Vietnamese students through questionnaire surveys and analysis of students' writing. Although Vietnamese has a rich system of measure words, Vietnamese learners of Chinese often omit measure words when modifying words representing people or objects in Vietnamese. The author proposed some teaching strategies to address these issues, including strengthening comparative research between Chinese and Vietnamese, selecting suitable teaching materials, timely correction by teachers, and applying learned measure words in practical life.

Xu Feng (2007), In 2007, Xu Feng conducted a comprehensive statistical analysis of the use of measure words by beginner and intermediate-level Japanese and Korean exchange students in Chinese essays in the paper titled 'Analysis of Errors in the Use of Measure Words by Beginner and Intermediate Japanese and Korean Exchange Students.' The study identified several common errors made by these students when using Chinese measure words, including the lack of measure words, excessive use of measure words, incorrect placement of quantity structures, and misuse of measure words. Additionally, the study emphasized the importance and difficulty of errors related to misuse of measure words and improper placement of measure words in Chinese measure word teaching.

Liu Ying (2008), In 2008, Liu Ying conducted a study titled 'Analysis of Errors in the Acquisition of Chinese Measure Words by Learners with English Background,' using the measure words specified in the 'Chinese Proficiency Standards and Curriculum Guidelines' as the research basis. Through the analysis of dynamic essay corpus

data, Liu found that European and American exchange students learning Chinese primarily made errors such as omissions, misuse, addition, and redundancy in Chinese measure word acquisition. Furthermore, negative transfer from the native language, as well as its negative influence on the target language, was identified as one of the main reasons for these errors.

Tian Yi (2009), In 2009, researcher Tian Yi compared the acquisition of measure words in first and second languages and conducted statistical charting of the distribution of measure words in the 'Chinese Vocabulary and Character Level Outline.' He pointed out that there is no fixed arrangement for international students to acquire measure words. This is because acquiring measure words in Chinese textbooks is highly random, and measure words are identified and memorized through sentence structures such as 'quantity noun.' These characteristics of acquisition are influenced by factors such as students' language strategies, language abilities, cognitive abilities, personal learning goals, and environments.

Tang Dong (2010), In 2010, Tang Dong selected action measure words in second language acquisition and teaching of Chinese as a foreign language as the research focus. Through questionnaire surveys of students from Madagascar, Indonesia, South Korea, and Japan, Tang systematically investigated the learning situation of these students in Chinese action measure words. Through statistical analysis, he found that gender and native language background had little influence on students' learning of action-measure words, and he tentatively inferred the approximate sequence of students' learning of action-measure words. Additionally, he analyzed some typical textbooks and teaching outlines and provided suggestions for textbook writing, teaching outline revision, and action measure word teaching.

Su Yongfeng (2012), In 2012, in master's thesis titled 'Research on the Acquisition and Error Analysis of Chinese Measure Words by Bulgarian Students,' Su Yongfeng mentioned the psychological concept of 'transfer,' referring to the influence of learners' previously acquired knowledge, skills, learning methods, and attitudes on the learning of new knowledge and skills. Transfer can be divided into positive transfer and negative transfer, with the latter being detrimental, also known as interference. The study found that negative transfer from the native language played a significant role in learning foreign languages, especially when the target language was unfamiliar, with about 30% of learning errors originating from this source. Therefore, in the early stages of measure word learning, students often apply habits from their native language to Chinese, resulting in various errors and becoming one of the main reasons for measure word deficiencies and omissions. Additionally, since Chinese has many action-measure words while the native language may only have one similar word, students may try to find a word in Chinese to replace all action-measure words, leading to expressions that do not conform to Chinese conventions. In the study, Su Yongfeng also mentioned

the influence of students' measure word learning strategies and described the differences between Chinese and the native language, emphasizing the influence of the native language on learning a second language.

Wang Xiaoyan (2015), In 2015, Wang Xiaoyan pointed out in her doctoral research 'Research on the Acquisition of Chinese Measure Words by Central Asian Students' the problems students face when learning Chinese measure words due to the influence of their native language. Regarding the classroom teaching of Chinese action measure words for Central Asian students, attention should be paid to the misuse caused by the negative transfer from their native language. In the learning process, Central Asian students' positive transfer of action measure words mainly manifests in borrowing action measure words because borrowed action measure words in Chinese are like nouns in Russian, resulting in a lower misuse rate and easier acquisition. Therefore, teachers should pay special attention to the grammatical and semantic analysis of specialized action measure words in the classroom, provide diverse exercises to promote mutual progress in teaching and learning, reduce the misuse of action measure words, improve issues prone to occur in action measure word teaching, and thus enhance the Chinese proficiency of Central Asian students. In the process of Central Asian students learning action measure words, they are influenced by transfer from their native language or target language and the influence of interlanguage, which is normal but should not be ignored. Therefore, in the teaching process, efforts should be made to avoid this influence, and teachers should minimize it as much as possible.

Cao Meiai (2017), In 2017, Cao Meiai explored the phenomenon of native language transfer in language acquisition in her doctoral thesis titled 'Research on the Acquisition and Teaching of Chinese Measure Words by Burmese Students.' Native language transfer refers to the phenomenon where learners apply their native language's linguistic system knowledge and rules to the process of acquiring a target language while mastering the target language. This transfer phenomenon can have both positive and negative effects on the target language, resulting in correct and incorrect outcomes. Typically, native language transfer is more common among students in the initial stages of learning because they have not yet established the second language system and often rely on their native language to understand the target language, leading to a higher likelihood and frequency of transfer. However, as learners' proficiency in the second language improves, the characteristics of negative native language transfer gradually weaken, and the possibility and frequency of transfer also decrease accordingly.

Results of the Literature Review

The literature review reveals several key insights into the combinatorial properties of Chinese noun measure words and Arabic classifiers, as well as their acquisition by learners from different linguistic backgrounds. The

following points summarize the main findings:

Acquisition of Chinese Measure Words

Research by Zhang (2005) indicates that the acquisition of Chinese measure words by foreign learners follows a distinct sequence, with quantifying measure words being acquired first, followed by individual measure words, action measure words, and collective measure words.

Learners tend to improve their proficiency in measuring words with increased exposure and learning time. However, they often face intralingual interference from their native language structures, leading to common errors such as rule generalization.

Challenges for Arabic Learners

Arabic learners of Chinese face unique challenges due to the absence of equivalent noun measure words in their native language. This structural difference requires them to develop new linguistic strategies to master Chinese measure words.

The complexity and diversity of Chinese measure words, combined with the syntactic and semantic nuances, pose additional difficulties for Arabic speakers, necessitating targeted instructional strategies.

Comparative Studies

Comparative studies between Chinese and other linguistic systems reveal both commonalities and disparities in quantification mechanisms. These studies highlight the importance of understanding the cultural and linguistic contexts that shape the use of measure words and classifiers.

Previous research has shown that languages with measure words, like Chinese, often rely heavily on these linguistic elements to convey precise meanings, whereas languages without measure words, like Arabic, use alternative structures such as numerical adjectives.

Pedagogical Implications

Effective teaching strategies for Chinese measure words should consider the learners' native language backgrounds and the specific challenges they face. For Arabic learners, incorporating comparative linguistic approaches can help bridge the gap between their native structures and Chinese measure words.

Teaching materials should emphasize the functional and contextual use of measure words, providing ample examples and practice opportunities to reinforce learning.

Opinion Based on Literature Review

The reviewed literature underscores the significance of Chinese measure words in quantifying and specifying nouns, a feature absent in Arabic. This disparity necessitates a nuanced approach to teaching Chinese to Arabic speakers, recognizing the structural differences and potential learning obstacles. Researchers and educators should focus on developing tailored instructional methods that address these challenges, fostering a

deeper understanding of measuring words' semantic and syntactic roles.

Furthermore, the literature highlights the broader implications of cross-linguistic studies in enriching our comprehension of linguistic diversity. By examining the unique features of different languages, we gain valuable insights into the cognitive and cultural factors that shape language use. Such comparative analyses not only enhance language teaching and learning but also contribute to the global appreciation of linguistic and cultural diversity.

Combinatorial Properties of Chinese Noun Measure Words

In contemporary Mandarin, classifiers represent a distinct category and stand out as one of the most culturally specific components within the language's lexical structure. Unlike languages with strict morphological rules, Mandarin relies heavily on classifiers to convey quantity relationships. As measure words gain increasing prominence in Mandarin studies, there is a growing focus on understanding the relationship between nouns and measure words. Exploring which measure words can accompany specific nouns and the constraints governing their usage becomes crucial in classifier research. Besides investigating the conventional pairings of nouns and measuring words, it is also valuable to explore unconventional combinations that add artistic flair to the language. Building upon the examination of standard noun-measure word collocations, this delves deeper into extraordinary pairings, aiming to offer a comprehensive exploration of this linguistic phenomenon and enhance our understanding of noun-measure word collocation.

While the relationship between nouns and measure words is a prevalent aspect of modern Chinese grammar, it tends to be overlooked. Nouns exhibit various characteristics, and when paired with measure words, these characteristics are accentuated, thereby playing a crucial role in distinguishing nouns from other parts of speech. Measure words in Chinese are abundant and adaptable, a feature that sets Chinese apart from the Arabic language. Their combination with nouns contributes to the organization and vividness of the language, leading to an increased focus on noun-measure word pairings. Early studies on the constraints of noun-measure word collocations introduced three main theories. Firstly, Lu Zhiwei proposed the '名词限制说, noun restriction theory,' suggesting that in the Beijing dialect《北京话单音词》, nouns lack quantity restrictions and require another type of word akin to a noun to express limitations. Secondly, Gao Mingkai presented the 'auxiliary noun theory《汉语语法论》' which highlights the role of auxiliary nouns in elucidating the units or attributes of objects, with numerals providing a framework for nouns, specifying the unique characteristics of each object. Thirdly, Liao Shujian proposed the theory that nouns dictate the selection of classifiers, adding a layer of logic and imagery to the classifier selection process based on nouns.

This explores the interdependent relationship between

nouns and measure words. While examining the typical pairings of nouns and measuring words, it becomes evident that unconventional combinations enrich the language. Previous research has investigated these unconventional pairings through cognitive and semantic perspectives; this study expands the scope to include grammatical and pragmatic considerations. Unconventional pairings provide flexibility in classifiers depending on the context, leading to greater linguistic diversity. In everyday speech, individuals typically select nouns and measure words based on personal habits, reflecting individual cognitive frameworks, and understanding. Each person's cognitive domain includes consciously or unconsciously memorized rules for pairing nouns and measuring words. Therefore, analyzing the interaction between nouns and measuring words from a cognitive perspective enhances its significance. In different contexts, different measure words associated with various noun pairings convey distinct meanings. While measuring words in standard

noun pairings often serves a quantifying function, unconventional pairings tend to emphasize the artistic dimension of language.

Variations in Measure Words' Stylistic Connotations The Stylistic Connotations of Classifiers

Chinese noun-measure words come with their own set of stylistic connotations. Take words like '伙' (huǒ), '窝' (wō), '群' (qún), '帮' (bāng), and '批' (pī), for example. These collective classifiers are often synonymous and can sometimes be used interchangeably. However, '帮' (bāng) and '窝' (wō) tend to carry negative undertones, as seen in phrases like '警察端了一窝小偷' which means 'The police nabbed a gang of thieves.' Variations in measure words' stylistic connotations can often carry negative undertones, adding depth to the language's expressive capacity. Certain measure words, when paired with nouns, can subtly imply unfavorable or pejorative meanings. Here are some more examples in the table:

Table 1:

| Measure word. | Pronunciation | Description | Examples |
|---------------|---------------|---|---|
| 帮 | bāng | This measure word is commonly associated with groups or gangs. In specific contexts, particularly in informal speech, its usage may carry negative implications. | 她带了一帮人来找麻烦。 She brought a gang of people to cause trouble. 这个地方常有一帮混混聚集。 This place often has a bunch of thugs gathering. |
| 窝 | wō | Mainly utilized as a measure word for animal habitats such as nests or dens, it can also be metaphorically extended to describe groups of people, typically suggesting disorderliness or undesirable characteristics. | 那个城市有一窝小偷。 That city has a den of thieves. 这个学校里有一窝不良学生。 There's a nest of delinquent students in this school. |
| 伙 | huǒ | Frequently employed to quantify groups of people or objects, this measure word can take on negative implications when denoting a questionable or undesirable collective. | 他和一伙人打算骗我 He and a bunch of people plan to deceive me. 这次选举有一伙投机分子干扰了整个过程。 This election was disrupted by a group of opportunists. |
| 群 | qún | While typically neutral in nature, when employed to characterize a gathering of individuals, it occasionally conveys a sense of disorder or negativity. | 这个公司里有一群懒散的员工。 There's a group of lazy employees in this company. 他总是和一群无聊的人在一起。 He's always with a bunch of boring people. |
| 众 | zhòng | used in a neutral sense to describe a group or crowd, its usage can occasionally carry negative undertones, particularly in situations associated with chaos or disorder. | 集市上人们一片众乱。 People are in chaos at the market. 演唱会现场出现了一片众声哗然。 There was an uproar in the audience at the concert. |
| 堆 | duī | used for piles or heaps, when applied to groups of people, it can carry negative connotations | 他们是一堆没礼貌的家伙。 They're a bunch of rude guys. 这个城市有一堆麻烦事。 This city has a lot of troubles. |

| | | | |
|---|-------|---|--|
| 张 | zhāng | used for flat objects like paper or sheets, it can take on a negative connotation when referring to people's faces. | ‘一张脸’ judgmental attitude towards someone's appearance. |
|---|-------|---|--|

Based on the examples provided in the table above, it's evident that Chinese noun measure words serve not only to quantify but also to convey negative connotations. This dual functionality underscores a distinctive feature of Chinese noun-measure words.

In the examples provided above, we observe how certain nominal analogical words in the Chinese language can convey negative meanings, a feature shared with Arabic. For instance, in Arabic, the word 'عصابة' ('asābah) translates to 'Gang' in English. Similarly, in Chinese, we can associate this negative connotation with the measure word '帮' (bāng). In Chinese, certain classifiers can also carry negative connotations when used to express a specific meaning. For instance, the classifier '张' (zhāng) typically denotes flat objects, as mentioned in the table. However, when used negatively, it can be paired with nouns to convey a negative sense. For example, '一张脸' (yī zhāng liǎn) literally translates to 'a flat face' or 'الوجه المسطح أو ذو الشكل المربع' in Arabic. This illustrates how classifiers in Chinese can convey nuanced meanings depending on the context and usage, adding layers of complexity to the language.

One of the Reasons for Extraordinary Pairings of Nouns and Classifiers is the Context, Context refers to the environment in which language is used, including the physical setting, discourse context, and the background knowledge of speakers and listeners, encompassing common life experiences and social, cultural, and historical knowledge. From the definition of extraordinary pairings of nouns and classifiers, it can be inferred that context plays a crucial role in their reasonable existence.

In verbal communication, adherence to communicative

principles is essential. These include principles of conversational cooperation, such as quantity, quality, relation, and manner, as well as principles of politeness, correlation, and ethics. Mr. Lu Jianming proposed the principle of 'answer coordination consistency,' which implies that the classifier used in response should match the one used in the question.

For example, if five people go to a restaurant together, the waiter might ask, '您几位啊?' The appropriate response would be, '五位.' The choice of the classifier '位' (wèi) is influenced by the context and the principle of answer coordination consistency. Similarly, on a bus, if an elderly woman speaks to a young person who hasn't offered her a seat, she might say, '哎呦, 这位不让座的大小伙子.....?' Here, the contextual effect transforms the meaning of '位' (wèi) to imply a negative tone.

The Intrinsic Significance of Classifiers

Classifiers often originate from nouns, thereby inheriting the core meaning of the noun or related concepts. Consequently, their selection of associated nouns is frequently influenced by semantic considerations. Take individual noun-measure words, for instance; they tend to encapsulate the outward attributes of the nouns they accompany. Consider '片' (piàn), which typically denotes objects that are flat and thin, without being excessively large, such as '一片纸 a piece of paper' or '一片面包 a slice of bread'. Similarly, '颗' (kē) is commonly employed for granular objects, like '一颗珠子 a bead' or '一颗子弹 a bullet'. This underscores the importance of aligning the nouns paired with these classifiers with the external characteristics inherent in the classifiers themselves.

Table 2:

| Measure word | Pronunciation | Meaning | Examples |
|--------------|---------------|--|--|
| 张 | zhāng | Flat, thin, or broad objects | 一张桌子 - A table, 一张纸- A piece of paper |
| 瓶 | píng | Bottled or containerized items | 一瓶酒 - A bottle of wine ,一瓶水- A bottle of water , |
| 枚 | méi | Small, round, or flat objects | 一枚戒- A ring ,一枚硬币 - A coin |
| 根 | gēn | Long, slender objects | 一根香蕉 - A banana, 一根铅笔- A pencil |
| 包 | bāo | Wrapped or bundled items | 一包面- A bag of flour, 一包糖- A bag of sugar |
| 个 | gè | General measure word for people or objects | 一个苹果- One apple, 一个人- One person |
| 条 | tiáo | Long, narrow objects | 一条鱼- A fish,一条河流 - A river |
| 只 | zhī | Animals or objects seen as individuals | 一只手- A hand,一只猫- A cat |
| 片 | piàn | Flat and thin objects | 一片面包- A slice of bread,一片叶子- A leaf |

| | | | |
|---|------|--|--|
| 颗 | kē | Granular objects or small, round items | 一颗子弹 - A bullet, 一颗珠子 - A bead |
| 把 | bǎ | Items with handles or grips | 一把刀 - A knife, 一把椅子 - A chair |
| 本 | běn | Bound or book-like objects | 一本杂志 - A magazine, 一本书 - A book |
| 块 | kuài | Solid or chunky objects | 一块巧克力 - A piece of chocolate, 一块石头 - A rock, |
| 条 | tiáo | Long, slender, or flexible objects | 一条鱼 - A fish, 一条裤 - A pair of pants |

As illustrated in the table below, each standard noun is paired with a specific noun-measure word, chosen based on considerations of shape, size, and thickness. In the Chinese language, every noun corresponds to its own measure word, reflecting its unique characteristics in terms of shape, size, and thickness.

In Arabic, there are no equivalent noun-measure words to those found in Chinese, which are used to denote specific characteristics such as shape or size before a noun. For example, in Chinese, measure words like ‘片’ (piàn) are utilized to describe flat and thin objects. However, Arabic typically conveys such distinctions through adjectives or contextual cues rather than specific measure words. For instance, to express ‘the paper is flat’ in Arabic,

one might say ‘حطسم قرول’ (al-warq musath), where ‘حطسم’ (musath) means ‘flat.’ Similarly, Arabic lacks measure words akin to ‘颗’ (kē) in Chinese, which is used for granular objects. Instead, Arabic employs different linguistic strategies to convey comparable meanings.

Habits and Fixed Collocations of Chinese Noun-Measure Words

In Chinese, measure words serve an essential function in expressing quantity and are frequently employed in habitual or predetermined combinations with nouns. Below, we delve deeper into this concept with more examples:

Table 3:

| Measure Word | Pronunciation | Meaning | Examples |
|--------------|---------------|-------------------|--|
| 卡 | kǎ | Calorie | 这个汉堡有四百卡路里。(This hamburger has 400 calories.), 一杯牛奶有一百五十卡路里。(A glass of milk contains 150 calories.) |
| 锅 | guō | Pot | 妈妈炖了一锅鸡汤。(Mom simmered a pot of chicken soup.), 她煮了一锅粥。(She made a pot of porridge.) |
| 盘 | pán | Plate | 她端了一盘水果拼盘。(She brought a plate of fruit platter.), 我点了一盘宫保鸡丁。(I ordered a plate of Kung Pao chicken.) |
| 壶 | hú | Pot (for liquids) | 我们喝了一壶美酒。(We drank a pot of wine.), 她沏了一壶绿茶。(She brewed a pot of green tea.) |
| 桶 | tǒng | Bucket | 妈妈买了一桶洗衣液。(Mom bought a bucket of laundry detergent.), 他买了一桶涂料。(He bought a bucket of paint.) |
| 碗 | wǎn | Bowl | 我要一碗面条。(I'd like a bowl of noodles.) 她吃了一碗米饭。(She ate a bowl of rice.), 我要一碗面条。(I'd like a bowl of noodles.) |
| 杯 | bēi | Cup/Glass | 我要一杯咖啡。(I'd like a cup of coffee.), 请给我一杯水。(Please give me a glass of water.) |
| 瓶 | píng | Bottle | 她喝了一瓶啤酒。(She drank a bottle of beer.), 我买了一瓶果汁。(I bought a bottle of juice.) |
| 包 | bāo | Packet/Bag | 妈妈买了一包奶粉。(Mom bought a packet of milk powder.), 我买了一包面粉。(I bought a bag of flour.) |

as depicted in the previously mentioned table, measure words in Chinese, such as ‘卡’ (kǎ) for calories and ‘锅’ (guō) for pots, serve not only to quantify objects but also carry distinct meanings. These measure words are often habitually paired with specific nouns. For instance, ‘卡’ (kǎ) is exclusively used for measuring calories and is typically paired with food-related nouns. Similarly, ‘锅’ (guō) is commonly utilized in expressions like ‘做了一锅

饭’ (made a pot of rice) or ‘热了一锅汤’ (heated a pot of soup), reflecting its habitual association with nouns related to cooking and liquids.

Chinese Nouns Measure Words and Arabic Classifiers

In Chinese, there are what are called measure words. When we mention the quantity of things or people,

these measure words should be added to the sentence. However, in Arabic, there are no equivalent translations or substitute words, so Arabic students face a significant problem when learning the grammar of measure words in Chinese.

For example, when we say this sentence in Arabic (خمسة أشخاص), the direct translation of this sentence in Chinese is (‘五人’), but in Chinese, this is not allowed. It must be accompanied by a measure word to make the sentence correct. It must be said as (五个人), where ‘五个’ is one of the phrases used in Chinese. Chinese contains many measure words, and objects or people have specific measure words. If we want to say how many people there are, we use the word ‘个’ (gè), which comes after the number in the sentence. So, the order of a measure word sentence is:

(数字 + 量词 + 名词)

(Number + Measure Word + Noun)

Example 2:

三个人 (Sān gè rén) → Three people → ثلاثة أشخاص

四个人 (Sì gè rén) → Four people → أربعة أشخاص

八个孩子 (Bā gè hái zǐ) → Eight children → ثمانية أطفال

七个人 (Qī gè rén) → Seven people → سبعة أشخاص

When referring to the quantity of animals, birds, or insects, we use the word ‘只’ (zhǐ), noting that it is not used with fish.

Example 3:

五只猫 (Wǔ zhī māo) → Five cats → خمسة قطط

七只猫 (Qī zhī māo) → Seven cats → سبعة قطط

四只鸡 (Sì zhī jī) → Four chickens → أربعة دجاج

六只苍蝇 (Liù zhī cāng yíng) → Six flies → ستة ذباب

When referring to streets, rivers, fish, or pants, we use the word ‘条’ (tiáo).

Example 4:

六条路 (Liù tiáo lù) → Six streets → ستة شوارع

五条路 (Wǔ tiáo lù) → Five streets → خمسة شوارع

七条河 (Qī tiáo hé) → Seven rivers → سبعة أنهار

八条裤子 (Bā tiáo kù zi) → Eight pants → ثمانية سراويل

In this table, some of the remaining parts of the measure words and their uses will be introduced.

Apart from the examples, there are cases where other measure words can be used. For instance, with the word ‘

Table 4:

| | | |
|---|--------|---|
| 张 | Zhāng | تستخدم للأشياء المسطحة مثل (طاولة، بطاقة، سيرير) |
| 位 | Wèi | تستخدم للأشخاص _ تعتبر أكثر تهذيباً من (↑) |
| 盘 | Pán | (تستخدم للاطباق و الاكلات (طبق معكرونة، طبق زجاجي) |
| 本 | Běn | (تستخدم للشياء ذات الاوراق (مجلات، ملفات، جرائد، كتب) |
| 瓶 | Píng | تستخدم للزجاجات (زجاجه زيت، زجاجه نبيذ، زجاجه ماء) |
| 把 | Bǎ | تستخدم للأشياء ذات القضبان و الاذرع (ممشط شعر، فرشاة اسنان، ملعقه، شوكة، شمسيه، كرسي بذراع) |
| 杯 | Bēi | تستخدم للكؤوس و الاكواب و الفناجين (فناجان قهوه، كوب ماء) |
| 家 | Jiā | تستخدم للمنشآت (مطعم، مركز، شركة، مدرسه) |
| 支 | Zhī | تستخدم للأشياء الطويله التي تشبه العصا (سيجاره، قلم، بندقية) |
| 双 | Shuāng | تستخدم للأشياء ذات الزوجين (عيدان الاكل، احذيه، قفازات) |
| 台 | Tái | تستخدم للالكترونيات و الالات (تلفزيون، هاتف، حاسب الي) |

公司/هدرش/ (company), we can use the word ‘家’ or the word ‘所’.

In Chinese, the numeral word ‘二’ (two) has specific usage with measure words, but in Arabic, the word for ‘two’ remains unchanged. This numeral ‘二’ was not used in the previous examples because it has unique grammatical properties associated with measure words. If we want to say there are two of something, we don’t use ‘二’; instead, we use ‘两’, which is also considered as ‘二’ but exclusively for use with measure words.

Example 5:

两个人 (Liǎng gè rén) → Two people → شخصين

两条路 (Liǎng tiáo lù) → Two roads → شارعين

两只猫 (Liǎng zhī māo) → Two cats → قطتين

‘个’ is one of the most common measure words in

Chinese, as mentioned earlier, it is used with people, but the word ‘个’ also has many other uses:

For things without specific measure words: Many things lack specific measure words, especially intangible ones like months, questions, or thoughts.

For things with special or less commonly used measure words: Some things have specific counterparts but are paired with ‘个’ because the associated measure words are less common, especially in spoken language rather than writing.

Measure words can also be combined with ‘这’ and ‘那’ (this and that), which mean ‘ذلك’ in Arabic. Though numbers are not mentioned here, standard words can be used with ‘这’ and ‘那’.

Example 6:

那个人是学生 (Nà gè rén shì xuéshēng) → That person is a student → ذلك الشخص هو طالب
 这本书挺好的 (Zhè běn shū tǐng hǎo de) → This book is very good → هذا الكتاب جيد

After explaining the differences between Arabic and Chinese in this grammar aspect, it is evident that there is no common denominator between Arabic and Chinese in this grammar structure, and translating text into Arabic using this grammar is not feasible. As previously mentioned, Arabic does not include classifiers like Chinese, which can cause confusion and difficulty for Arabic students learning Chinese, as Chinese contains many words with classifiers. Arabic students find it challenging to remember all the classifiers when learning Chinese. Overall, when Arabic students learn Chinese and want to use classifiers, they often pair the word ‘个’ with everything because it is a famous word among Arabic students. Arabic lacks such rules, making it difficult for Arabic students in this aspect, indicating the negative impact of the mother tongue on the target language learning.

The Constraint Effect Of Nouns On Noun-Measure Words

In Chinese, the choice of numeral before a classifier is often flexible, allowing for variations like ‘一杯茶’ (yī bēi chá), ‘两杯茶’ (liǎng bēi chá), and so forth, all meaning ‘a cup of tea’ or ‘كوب من الشاي’, two cups of tea’ respectively. However, certain phrases have fixed or constrained usage, where only a specific numeral can be used. For instance, in expressions like ‘一片爱心’ (yī piàn ài xīn) meaning ‘a piece of love’ or ‘a body full of sweat’, only the numeral ‘一’ (yī) can be used. This restriction arises due to the idiomatic nature of these expressions, which have evolved to convey specific meanings. Other examples include ‘一口气’ (yī kǒu qì) meaning ‘in one breath’ and ‘一对夫妻’ (yī duì fū qī) meaning ‘a married couple,’ where the numeral ‘一’ (yī) is fixed. These constraints ensure clarity and consistency in communication, as these phrases carry nuanced meanings that would be lost if different numerals were used. In this context, the Arabic language lacks a similar structure, which can pose challenges for students learning Chinese as a second language. Unlike Chinese, where classifiers play a significant role in conveying specific meanings and nuances, Arabic does not have an equivalent system. As a result, students may encounter difficulties in grasping the nuanced usage of classifiers in Chinese, particularly when they carry negative connotations or convey specific characteristics. This highlights the importance of understanding the cultural and linguistic differences between Arabic and Chinese to facilitate effective language learning and communication.

CONCLUSION

Chinese measure words play a critical role in quantifying and specifying nouns, exhibiting diverse semantic alignments and syntactic patterns, whereas Arabic

lacks a direct equivalent, instead relying on numerical adjectives and context-based inference. Consequently, Arabic learners of Chinese face unique challenges in understanding and using measure words correctly, highlighting the need for specialized teaching strategies that account for learners’ native language backgrounds. Comparative linguistic approaches can bridge the gap between Arabic and Chinese quantification systems, aiding learners in mastering measure words. This study underscores the importance of tailored instructional methods to support Arabic learners of Chinese by acknowledging structural differences and developing effective teaching materials and strategies, thereby fostering a deeper understanding of measure words. Additionally, this research contributes to cross-linguistic studies by highlighting the value of comparative analyses in uncovering language complexities and promoting greater intercultural exchange and appreciation. Future research should continue exploring the intersection of Chinese measure words and Arabic classifiers to gain further insights into the cognitive and cultural factors influencing language learning and usage, ultimately fostering a more inclusive approach to language learning and communication.

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