

# Comparative Quantitative Analysis of Tibetan and English Language and Culture in China from 1981 to 2019

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## ABSTRACT

This article sorts out 95 Chinese Tibetan-English language and cultural journal articles from 1976 to 2012, and analyzes the literature using statistical methods. The results show that the existing results have achieved certain research results in Tibetan-English grammar, Tibetan-English pronunciation, Tibetan-English proverbs, Tibetan-English euphemisms, Tibetan-English color culture, food culture, digital culture, and custom culture, which is helpful to get a glimpse of the current Chinese comparative study of Tibetan and English language and culture, and is conducive to further promoting Tibetan-English cross-domain communication.

*Keywords: Tibetan-Chinese-English trilingualism, Tibetan-English bilingualism, cross-cultural, learning characteristics, visualized analysis*

## I. INTRODUCTION

Tibetan language culture and English language culture belong to different language families and cultural systems, but they are essentially related and comparable. First of all, Tibetan and English have their own characteristics in phonetics, grammar and vocabulary, but they have common physical and physiological attributes [1]<sup>p1</sup>. Secondly, language is a part of culture and plays an important role in culture; from another perspective, language is influenced by culture and reflects culture [1]<sup>p241</sup>. Therefore, not only the language of Tibetan and English, but also the culture of Tibetan and English should be compared. By exploring the similarities and differences between Tibetan and English languages and cultures, revealing their commonalities and their respective characteristics, it is helpful to the learning of Tibetan and English language and culture [1]<sup>p244</sup>. Therefore, the comparative study of Tibetan and English language and culture has important academic value.

## II. DATA SOURCES AND RESEARCH TOOLS

Relying on the China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI) database<sup>1</sup>, the advanced search was conducted with "Tibet + English" as the subject. A total of 517 original data records were obtained, and the publication time was from 1981 to 2019. After repeated screening and screening, 95 valid journal articles were obtained, and the retrieval date was February 13, 2020.

The research tool used in this article is VOSVIEWER (version 1.6.14) developed by Leiden University in the Netherlands, which can clearly present the overview of the comparative study of Tibetan and English language and culture in the past 30 years in China.

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<sup>1</sup> The reason for the large discrepancy between the original data and the effective data is that "藏" is a polyphonic character. In a large part of the literature, the word "藏" should be pronounced as "cáng", which means "collection", rather than "place names or name of nationality (pronounced as 'zàng')".

### III. RETROSPECT: A CLUSTER ANALYSIS OF HOTSPOTS IN THE COMPARATIVE STUDY OF TIBETAN AND ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND CULTURE FROM 1981 TO 2019 IN CHINA

#### A. The time trajectory of the comparative study of Tibetan and English language in China

Judging from the annual distribution of documents, the Tibetan-English language and culture research in China has roughly gone through three stages of development (see "Fig. 1"). Chinese scholars first set foot in the study of Tibetan-English language and culture in 1981. Scholar Wei Zhizhen introduced the 1975 edition of "Modern Tibetan-English Dictionary of Tibetan". [2]Then the research from 1989 to 1991 mainly focused on the evaluation and introduction of Tibetan-English reference books. At this stage, the

comparative aspect of Tibetan-English language and culture had not yet been really involved, and it was still in a dormant period. The first stage is the initial period. From 1993 to 1997, there were 3 academic papers on Tibetan and English language and culture research, and related research gradually entered the academic field of vision. The second stage is the rising period from 2005 to 2010. With the rise of trilingual education in ethnic areas, more and more scholars have begun to focus on "Tibetan-Chinese-English" trilingual teaching and related cultural research. The third stage is the heyday from 2014 to 2016. In this stage, the subject of research has shifted from focusing on education to focusing on cultural aspects, responding to the country's call for attention to the protection and development of ethnic minority culture. Among them, the number of articles published in 2015 was 10, and the number of articles published in 2016 was 16, reaching a record high.

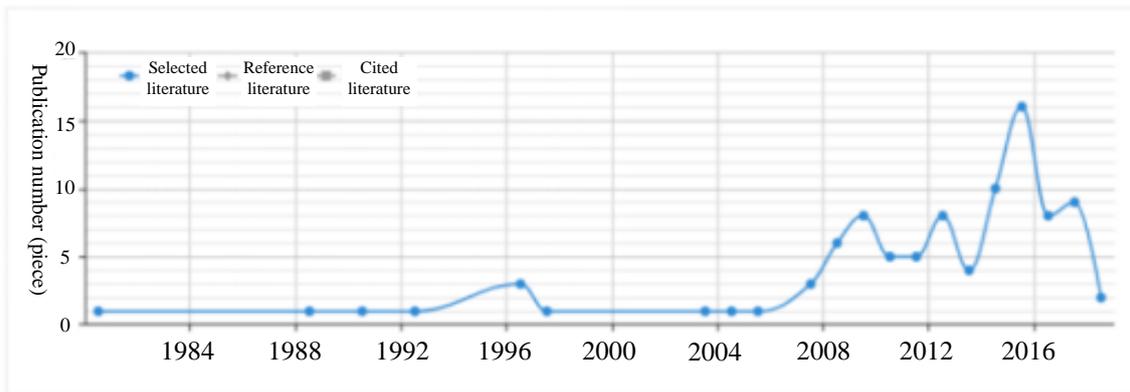


Fig. 1. The annual publication chart of the comparative study of Tibetan and English language and culture in China from 1981 to 2019.

#### B. A hotspot map of comparative studies on Tibetan and English language and culture from 1981 to 2019 in China

A total of 210 keywords were obtained after synonym merging for all keywords of 95 articles, and then the frequency threshold was set to 2 in the VOSVIEWER<sup>2</sup>. A total of 30 keywords were eligible. For the consideration of reliability and validity, the frequency of keyword occurrence is used as the weight, and finally a knowledge graph of keyword clustering is generated (see "Fig. 2" for details).

<sup>2</sup> Filter, replace, and merge without affecting the meaning of the keywords, such as replacing "English-Tibetan" with "Tibetan-English", and replacing "Tibetan-English", "Tibetan-Chinese-English", "Tibetan, Chinese, and English" with "Tibetan-Chinese-English" to unify. But "contrast" and "comparison" are still reserved.

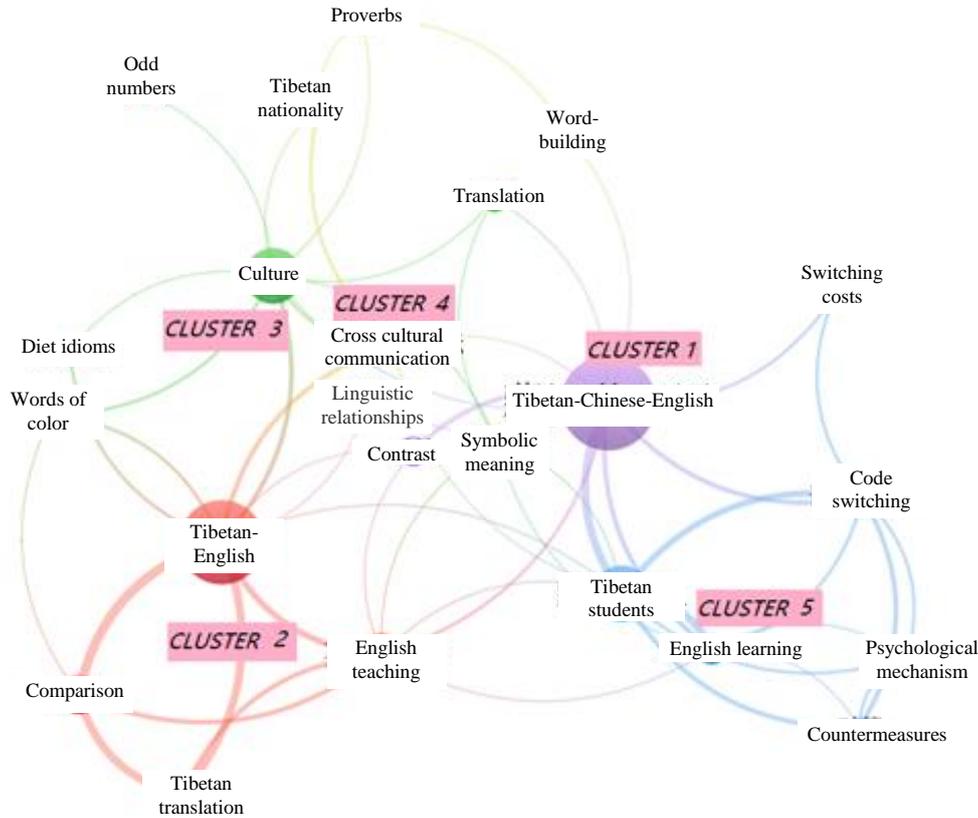


Fig. 2. The clustering diagram of the hotspot of the comparative study of Tibetan And English language culture in China from 1981 to 2019.

C. Three aspects of Tibetan and English language and culture comparative study in China from 1981 to 2019

1) A comparative study of Tibetan, Chinese and English from the perspective of language: As shown in the "Fig. 2", cluster 1 mainly focuses on the comparative study of Tibetan-Chinese-English trilingual background, language elements and the origin of proverbs.

a) Research on Tibetan-Chinese-English Trilingual background: The comparative study of Tibetan-Chinese-English trilingualism is not rootless theory, but is based on the practical consideration of trilingual education. In China, in minority areas, trilingual teaching (that is, teaching in the three languages of ethnic language, Chinese and English) is very common [3]<sup>209</sup>. In the past 30 years, trilingual education research has evolved from spontaneous language teaching experiments in individual regions to the current large-scale teaching normal throughout the country, which has become a major educational event in the field of education in China [4]. The reason is that trilingual education research is an important means to systematically develop the multilingual ability of minority students, promote the development of foreign

language education in minority areas, and build the multiculture [5]. As a special educational phenomenon in Tibetan areas, Tibetan-Chinese-English trilingual teaching has attracted the attention of experts and scholars in related fields [6].

b) A comparative study of the language elements and the origin of proverbs in Tibetan, Chinese and English: First of all, language has four elements, namely phonetics, vocabulary, grammar, and characters. Tibetan, Chinese and English are no exception. Tibetan, Chinese and English have common features in phonetics, vocabulary and grammar: all three languages can express information by speaking or writing, while the recipient can receive information by listening or watching [7]; The basic semantic concepts of vocabulary exist in all semantic concepts, and each language has corresponding words to express these concepts [7]; The three languages have a wide range of grammar, including phonetic system, vocabulary structure, syntactic structure, etc. [7]. The written language of Tibetan, Chinese and English has different characteristics: Chinese is ideographic writing, English is alphabetic writing, and Tibetan is a consonant phonetic script created with reference to the Sanskrit alphabet system [3]<sup>210</sup>.

Secondly, proverbs are a relatively stable component of the language system. The origins of proverbs are similar in different languages [8]. The origins of Tibetan, Chinese and English proverbs are closely related to the rise of oral language and literature [9], which all have the aesthetic commonality of folklore beauty, philosophical beauty, and rhetorical beauty [10].

2) *A comparative study of Tibetan-English bilingualism and its teaching, Tibetan-English culture, and Tibetan-English cross-cultural communication:* Clusters 2, 3, and 4 correspond to the comparative study of Tibetan-English bilingualism and its teaching, Tibetan and English culture, and Tibetan and English cross-cultural communication.

a) *A comparative study of Tibetan-English bilingualism and its teaching:* Grammar is a collection of structural rules of language, which restricts the relationship between language units and is an important part of language. The comparative study of Tibetan and English grammar helps to better understand Tibetan and English language. Studies have shown that Tibetan-English subject [11] and Tibetan-English predicate [12] have similarities and differences in concept, word order and form; Tibetan-English objects have similarities and differences in function [13]. On this basis, it puts forward a targeted development of English teaching strategies using the native Tibetan language as the medium, as well as ways to stimulate Tibetan students' English learning motivation and cultivate Tibetan students' multilingual psychology and multicultural awareness [14].

b) *A comparative study of Tibetan and English culture:* The key words of this cluster are "diet idioms", "color words" and "odd numbers", which correspond to the comparative study of Tibetan-English food idiom culture, Tibetan-English color culture and Tibetan-English digital culture respectively. In terms of Tibetan and English food idioms and culture, some scholars believe that due to the similarities and differences in the cultural backgrounds of Tibetan and British peoples, there are similarities and differences in the metaphors contained in food-related idioms created by Tibetan and British peoples [15]. In terms of the cultural symbols of Tibetan and English color words, the Tibetan and English color words related to red are mostly derogatory and both cultures advocate white; Yellow is replaced by gold in Tibetan culture. It has cultural symbolic meanings of rights, sacredness, wealth and dignity, but it has a deep derogatory meaning in the English culture; Black is a derogatory term in the Tibetan and English culture [16]. In terms of Tibetan and English digital culture, a comparative analysis was carried out of the folklore commonality and

individuality of numbers one, three, five, seven, nine and thirteen in Tibetan and English culture [17].

c) *A comparative study of Tibetan and English cross-cultural communication:* Tibetan and English cross-cultural communication refers to interactive practical activities between people with Tibetan and English cultural backgrounds. The comparative study of Tibetan and English cross-cultural communication is an extension of the teaching and discussion of Tibetan and English language and culture. Existing research mainly explores Tibetan and English cross-cultural communication from a non-verbal perspective, such as eye contact, touch, meeting etiquette and other non-verbal differences in cross-cultural communication [18]; another example is the structure, origin, naming method of Tibetan and English names, etc. [19]; there are also some studies to find the reasons for barriers to cross-cultural communication from the aspects of geographical environment and national character [20]. Based on the analysis of the causes, they put forward suggestions to avoid barriers to cross-cultural communication, believing that one should understand each other's posture, movements and cultural taboos, be willing and accept the cultures of other ethnic groups, and respect the differences between ethnic groups [21] etc.

3) *A study on the characteristics of Tibetan students' English learning:* Cluster 5 shows that the English learning characteristics of Tibetan students are one of the hotspots of comparative research on Tibetan and English language and culture. From the perspective of the research objects, 80% of the research results are aimed at the English acquisition of ethnic bilinguals... From the perspective of the research content, it is mainly concentrated in the field of "how to learn" by students [22]. The results show that the English learning characteristics of Tibetan students are: the learning motivation is mainly external motivation; the English learning of Tibetan college students involves the conversion of Tibetan, Chinese, and English codes, which is a complicated process; there is a lack of a good English learning environment [23].

#### IV. CONCLUSION

A quantitative and visual analysis of Tibetan-English language and cultural studies in China since the 20th century shows that related scholars have made great contributions to this research and achieved good results. Generally speaking, the research mainly focuses on the teaching and learning of English language and culture in the Tibetan language background from the perspective of language, grammar and others; at the same time, some researches compare Tibetan and English language and culture from the perspectives of

food, color, numbers, etc. Regardless of the angle of approach, they are all aimed at better understanding each other between Tibetan language and culture, and promoting and guiding language teaching and cross-cultural communication. In addition, it is also necessary to be aware of that: first, in terms of research methods, in addition to static comparative research from synchronicity, dynamic comparison of Tibetan and English language and culture can be considered from diachronic; second, the research perspective can be appropriately changed from "self (Tibetan and Chinese language and culture)" to "other (English language and culture)". The change of reference objects can allow researchers to see different research landscapes, and the research will be more comprehensive; third, the level of research can be from the surface to the interior, from the outside to the inside, from the part to the whole, from the concrete to the abstract, further highlighting the theme of the national spirit, national psychology, and national thinking.

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