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**| RESEARCH ARTICLE**

## **The Diachronic Change of Ren Rongrong's Translation: A Corpus-based Research on Reduplication in His Chinese Translation of Children's Literature**

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**| ABSTRACT**

Based on a self-built corpus, a statistical and multidimensional comparative analysis is performed to determine the diachronic change in the application of reduplications in Ren's five representative translated works for children literature (spanning 24 years) and relevant factors. The total number of reduplicated words in the five translated works showed a downward trend, as well as the frequency of AA and ANA. The frequency of ABB, ABAB, and AABB forms showed no obvious upward or downward trend but fluctuated significantly. The diversity and variation of the application of reduplication are not only related to the function of reduplicated words themselves but also influenced by the original text, the translator, and the readers.

**| KEYWORDS**

Ren Rongrong; Translation of Children's Literature; Reduplication; Corpus

**| ARTICLE INFORMATION**

**ACCEPTED:** 02 September 2023

**PUBLISHED:** 18 September 2023

**DOI:** 10.32996/ijels.2023.5.3.8

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### **1. Introduction**

Ren Rongrong, a famous Chinese translator and writer of children's literature, published his first translated children's literature written by Turkish writer Sadri Eytan in the inaugural issue of *New Literature* magazine on January 1, 1946. In 2012, he was recognized with the Lifetime Achievement Award in Translation from the Translators Association of China. He has translated more than 300 famous foreign children's literature into English, Russian, Italian, and Japanese. He is a renowned translator of children's literature, and his translations have brought countless moments of happiness to generations of kids. Sadly, on September 22, 2022, the 100-Year-Old Fairy Tale finally reached its conclusion. Over the years, many scholars have studied Ren's translation ideas, translation strategies, and translated works, but most of them are limited to static observations, with little in-depth analysis and description of dynamics. However, nothing is static, and neither are the translators' translations and their strategies. In Ren's more than seventy years of being a translator, has his translation strategy shifted? If so, how did these changes reflect on the texts? What are the reasons behind this shift? What are the implications for the translation and creation of Chinese children's literature? In this paper, the author examines five translations of children's literature by Ren that were produced over a 24-year period. The focus is on the changes that occurred in Ren's translations over time and the reasons behind these changes. Starting with reduplicated words that appear in the translations, the author pays tribute to the old child who has devoted his life to children and hopes to provide reference materials for those who are interested in translating or creating Chinese children's literature in the future.

### **2. Research Status of Ren's View of Translation and Translation Strategies**

The author conducts a professional search on CNKI with SU=('任溶溶')\*翻译 to retrieve research articles about Ren's translation. 64 articles were found to be relevant to the topic, covering the period from 2003 to 2021. This shows that many researchers have paid attention to Ren's translations of children's literature in recent years. These articles can be divided into two categories. The first category takes Ren as the direct research object and summarizes his translation ideas from a macro-perspective. In the second category of studies, researchers focus on analyzing Ren's translated works or comparing them to translations by other authors.

They examine Ren's translation strategies for children's literature from a specific theoretical perspective. However, the author observed that despite using different theories, the conclusions of these studies are largely similar in terms of their understanding of Ren's translation ideas. Therefore, the author selects typical representative studies and states the current situation of domestic scholars' research on Ren's translation strategies for children's literature.

Wang Shanshan (2008) believes that in his practice of translating children's literature, Ren has "followed the translation principles of childishness, colloquialism, and creativity" and has elaborated these three translation principles from three levels: textual equivalence, stylistic equivalence, and cultural equivalence. At the same time, she believes that Ren's childhood experience and personal character also have a significant influence on the formation of his translation ideas. Liu Qiuxi (2015) has also made a similar conclusion, and she once took Ren's opinions or practical experiences about children's literature translation as the fulcrum and summarized Ren's translation propositions into the following four points: faithfulness orientation-based, oral orientation-based, childishness orientation-based, and situation orientation-based. Dong Haiya (2014) explored Ren's translation style through picture books he translated in his later years. She argues that (ibid.: 20) "the Chinese translations of Ren's picture books effectively preserve the original style while being accessible and engaging to children, and achieve the integration of text and pictures. It can be manifested in three aspects: the use of strong rhythm and rhyme, appropriate word choices that blend text and pictures, and a balanced mix of colloquial and literary language."

Since 2010, scholars in China have analyzed Ren's translations using various translation theories. These studies can be divided into three categories: 1) examining a particular translation, 2) comparing two or more of Ren's translations of different works, and 3) comparing Ren's translations to those of other translators of the same original work. Song Songyan (2010), under the guidance of functional equivalence translation theory, discusses the translation strategy of children's literature with the example of Charlotte's Web. He believes that Ren can "see the world from the perspective of children, to think with children's thinking, to speak with children's language"; thus, he can present an excellent translation for those little readers. Sun Wenjuan (2020) finds that Ren is a master of applying reduplicated words, onomatopoeia, and colloquial vocabulary in his translation and prefers rhetoric as well as naturalization and dissimilation. Yu Yang (2015) analyzes and compares Kang Xin's translation of Charlotte's Web with Ren's translation from a social and cultural perspective and lists religious vocabulary, proper nouns, and units of measurement for analysis. He concludes that, in comparison, Ren's translation maintains more of the style of the original work and focuses more on children. Zhou Wangyue and Shao Bin (2014) discovered that "the social context, target readers, and translator's subjectivity are the deep-seated reasons for the different translation characteristics of the three translations" in a comparative study of Kang Xin's translation of Charlotte's Web, Ren's translation, and Xiao Mao's translation. They suggest that Ren adheres to the principle of children's orientation and adopts the translation strategy of domestication and foreignization, which not only maintains the style of the original work but also adds rich humor and optimistic childishness to the translation.

In summary, from the existing studies in China, the author believes that, as a leading figure and a golden sign in the field of children's literature translation, Ren's cultural contribution has not attracted sufficient attention. On the one hand, domestic authoritative journals have not published articles on Ren's translation studies. This shows that Ren's translation of children's literature has not attracted sufficient attention from the academic community. On the other hand, most of the few articles are reprocessed based on previous studies, and the research contents overlap; for example, there are as many as 28 studies on Ren's translation of Charlotte's Web alone.

### 3. The Dynamic Changes in Ren's Translation Through Corpus Analysis of Reduplicated Words

The main reason for choosing the reduplicated words in Ren's children's literature translations as the main object of study is that social factors less influence these translated reduplicated words and are mainly handled under the guidance of the translator's own translation concept, which can fully reflect the translator's autonomy. As one of the characteristics of the Chinese language, the phonetic, semantic, and formal aspects of reduplicated words can highlight the phonetic, figurative, and meaningful beauty of the Chinese language, which can further tell stories for children in a three-dimensional way from the auditory, visual, and emotional aspects and enhance children's interest in reading. In the translation of children's literature into Chinese, the strategic use of reduplication can enhance the appeal of the original story, improve children's understanding of the Chinese language and culture, and enhance their appreciation of the story's aesthetics. This is an important aspect of linguistic research in the translation of children's literature into Chinese. (Han Yang, 2019: 19).

In this paper, the author classifies reduplicated words into five categories. 1) AA form, including AAB, AABC, and BCAA forms. For the sake of consistency in the classification and comparison of across corpora, A了A, A-A as embedded in AA) are not categorized in this paper for examination; 2) AAB form; 3) AABB form; 4) ABAB form; 5) ANA form, including ABA and ABAC form.

To begin, the author chose five translated works by Ren Rongrong to include in the corpus database. These works span a 24-year period and are representative of the author's writing. The selected works are 《随风而来的玛丽·波平斯阿姨》 (published in 1983

《借东西的地下小人》(published in 1990) 《吹小号的天鹅》(published in 1999) 《夏洛的网》(published in 2004) 《小熊维尼·阿嚏》(published in 2007) and the corresponding originals are *Marry Poppins*, *The Borrowers*, *The Trumpet of the Swan*, *Charlotte's Web*, and *Winnie-the-Pooh*. All five works are children's novels with similar Chinese word counts, making them highly comparable. To ensure accuracy in the study, the author selected only first-edition translations by the translators.

Next, the author processed the corpus. As some of the works were quite old, they used OCR text recognition and scanning software, including White Scanner and ABBYY Finereader15, to convert scanned PDF documents and images into editable Word documents. Since the above two software cannot restore the content of the works completely and accurately, the text needs to be proofread and denoise. The main process of proofreading includes correcting typos, modifying punctuation, removing gibberish and extra spaces, and carriage returns. Denoising involves getting rid of images, page numbers, headers, comments, and any formatting or content that does not meet the requirements for building the corpus. After completion of proofreading and noise reduction, the corpus is further processed by TagAnt, and the finished text is saved in Txt format and encoded in utf-8 format for subsequent corpus storage and analysis.

In the third step, the author used Hycon 3.9.9 corpus software to collect and analyze the collected corpus for reduplicated words.

Table 1: Corpus Capacity of Five Translated Works

	A	B	C	D	E
types	76,780	80,538	88,083	71,020	51,163
tokens	4,981	5,228	5,818	4,971	2,923

Figure 1: Frequency of Reduplicated Words in Ren's Translations

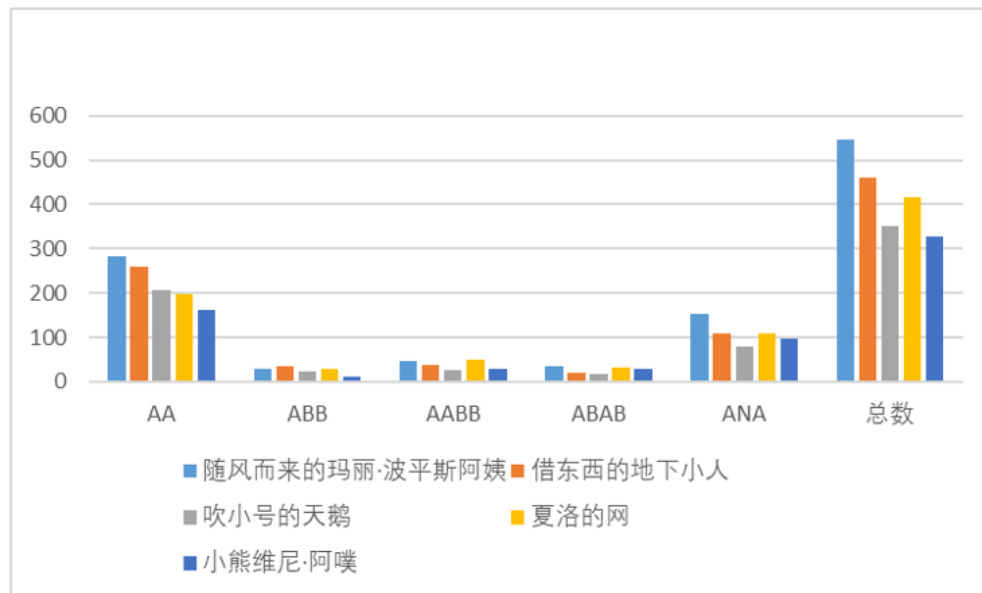
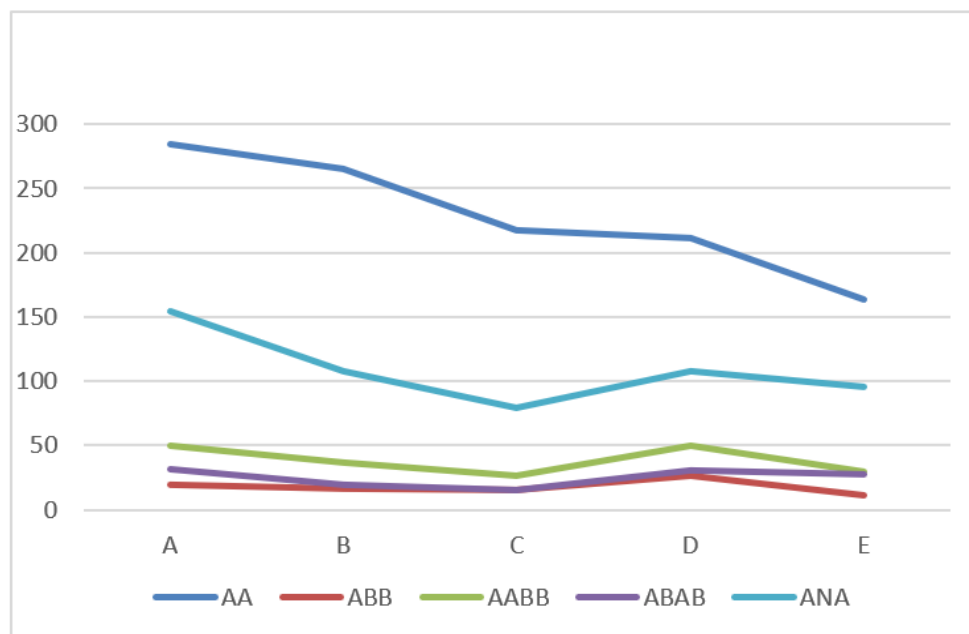


Figure 2: Trend of Changes of Reduplicated Words in Ren's Translations



By analyzing and comparing the original text and the translation, it can be found that the application of reduplicated words in Ren's Chinese translation process can be divided into three cases. The first case is counter-translation, where the translation aligns with the original English text. This case is relatively rare because of the lower frequency of reduplicated words in English compared to the Chinese. This is why reduplicated words are often seen as a characteristic of the Chinese language. The second case is additive translation, where reduplicated words in the translation do not have an equivalent in the original English. The third case is explicit translation, where certain words in the original English are intensified or explicitly translated for their semantic meaning.

The results indicate that the frequency of AA and ANA reduplicated words decreased, while the frequency of ABB, ABAB, and AABB reduplicated words did not show a clear trend and fluctuated significantly. Additionally, the total number of reduplicated words decreased. However, the figure suggests that although the overall trend is decreasing, this change is unstable and variable.

#### 4. Reasons for the Evolution of Ren's Translation

Based on the above-mentioned studies, it is evident that Ren uses reduplicated words in his Chinese translations of children's literature. Additionally, the frequency of his use of reduplicated words fluctuates and varies, which is linked to the diverse functional properties of different reduplicated words and the subjectivity of translators. In the following paragraphs, the author will analyze the causes of Ren's translation changes from three perspectives: the original work, the translator, and the reader.

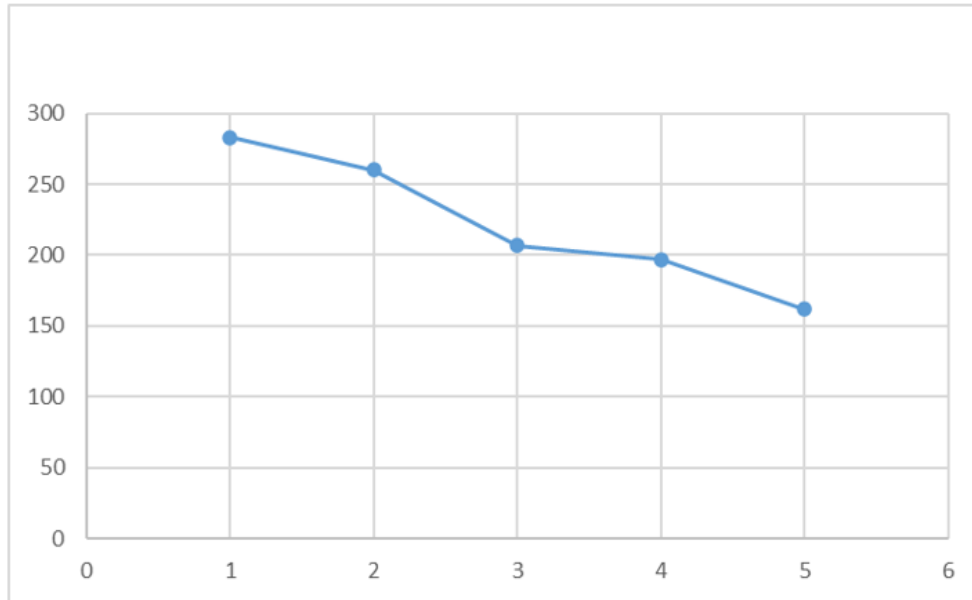
##### 4.1 Affected by Original Works

According to Figure 2, there is a noticeable decline in the use of reduplicated words in the top three children's works. This decline is observed in both the total number of reduplicated words used and the number of reduplicated words used in a single category. Among these works, 《吹小号的天鹅》 contains the lowest number of reduplicated words in all categories. MetaMetrics is an educational measurement and research organization that develops scientific measures of student achievement that link assessment with targeted instruction to improve learning. Funded by the National Institute of Health, the organization created the Lexile Framework for Reading in 1997 after 15 years of research. As of today, this system has become one of the standard assessment systems for reading in English and is used to measure individual reading levels. It also helps individuals in selecting appropriate reading materials by marking the difficulty of books.

The Trumpet of the Swan has a Lexile Index of 750L, which ranks at the top of the five children's literature works in terms of reading difficulty. In the opinion of the author, even though the reading system is designed for English readers, its assessment of vocabulary complexity can also be useful for Chinese readers to a certain degree. The Lexile framework for reading evaluates the difficulty of a text based on two factors: semantic and syntactic difficulties. Put simply, semantic difficulty refers to the complexity of vocabulary. As a word is used repeatedly in a text, the text becomes simpler. In Ren's translation, there are not only a number of reduplicated words but also repeated ones. In 《随风而来的玛丽波平斯阿姨》, the earliest published one of the five works, the frequency of single-word reduplication is as high as 283 times, and many reduplicated words are repeated, such as “轻轻” for 27 times, “看看”

for 26 times, “娃娃” and “慢慢” for 13 times, and “亲亲” for 11 times. A large number of these reduplicated words and the high repetition frequency show that Ren actually paid much attention to childish language in the early period or a specific period.

Figure 3: Frequency of AA Reduplicated Words in Ren's Translations



1) So she kissed her Red Calf and told it to be good.

于是它亲亲红小牛，叫它乖乖的。（《随风而来的玛丽·波平斯阿姨》）

2) Jane looked at it. She could see that it had been carefully oiled and combed into ringlets.

简瞧了瞧，鬃毛仔细抹上油，卷成许多小圈圈。（《随风而来的玛丽·波平斯阿姨》）

3) She saw great chair legs rearing up into sunlight;

她看见巨大的椅子腿高高耸入阳光中；（《借东西的地下小人》）

Below it on the path lay a stain of pinkish petals and, at the tree's foot, pale as butter, a nest of primroses.

4) 在树下，路上撒着一片粉红色的花瓣，就在树脚那里有一丛像牛油一样白白的樱草。（《借东西的地下小人》）

5) The male stretched out his great wings, eight feet from tip to tip, and gave the water a mighty clout to show his strength.

雄天鹅展开他的两只巨大翅膀，从这边翅膀尖到那边翅膀尖足有八英尺长，再在水上狠狠地拍了一下显显它的力气。（《吹小号的天鹅》）

6) "Use your ears; use your eyes!"

“好好吃，好好喝！”（《吹小号的天鹅》）

7) "You will have a tendency to swim in circles because your left foot will push better than your right foot."

“你游起来会打转转，因为你的左脚划水比右脚有力。”（《吹小号的天鹅》）

8) Skim milk, crusts, middlings, bits of doughnuts, wheat cakes with drops of maple syrup sticking to them, potato skins, leftover custard pudding with raisins, and bits of Shredded Wheat.

脱脂牛奶、面包皮、麦麸、炸面圈碎块、上面滴着枫糖浆的麦饼、土豆皮、吃剩的葡萄干蛋奶布丁、脆麦片条屑屑。（《夏洛的网》）

7) From two to three, he planned to scratch itchy places by rubbing against the fence.

从两点到三点，它打算抵着栏板挠身上的痒痒。（《夏洛的网》）

8) The barn was still dark.

谷仓还是黑黑的。（《夏洛的网》）

9) "and it would be very convenient just to hang the towels on them."

“在它们上面挂毛巾倒正合适。”（《维尼小熊·阿嚏》）

10) "Now I'll just wash it first, and then you can write on it."

“现在我去把它洗洗干净，你就能在它上面写字了。”（《维尼小熊·阿嚏》）

11) "Suppose I carried my family about with me in my pocket; how many pockets should I want?"

“要是我要用我的袋袋装着我的一家子走来走去，我得有多少个袋袋啊？”（《维尼小熊·阿嚏》）

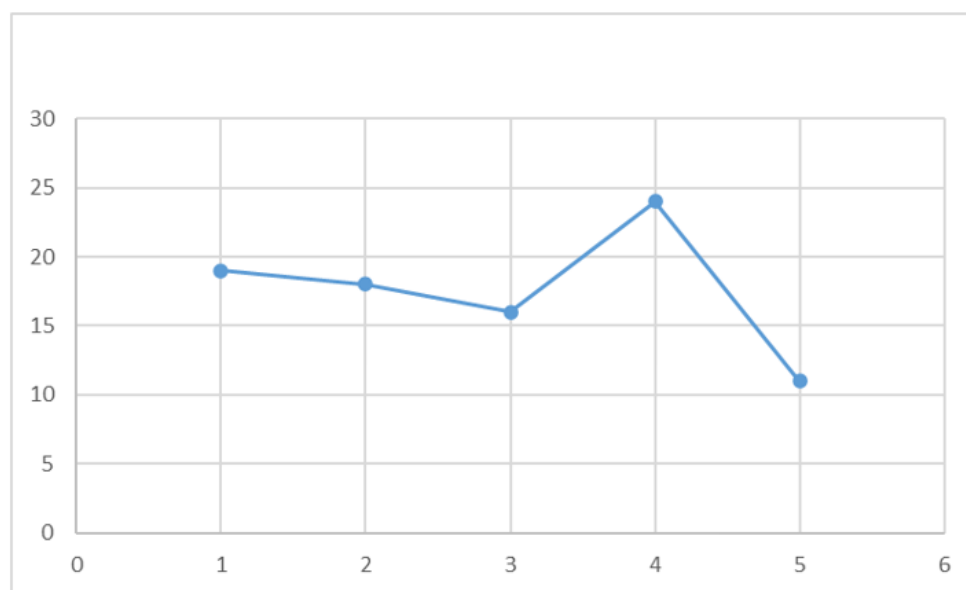
#### 4.2 Affected by Translator Subjectivity

In an interview with Global People magazine, Ren talked about the difference between translating children's books and translating other literary works. He expresses his opinion that "since children's books are written for children, the language used is less complex, so the translation should also be in simple language as usual." Li Sihui's analysis of Ren's translation style using the corpus revealed that the total number of reduplicated words in Ren's three editions of *Charlotte's Web* was equal to the combined number of reduplicated words in Kang Xin's and Xiao Mao's translations. (S. H. Li, 2021: 88). This is because "during the critical stage of language learning, children tend to prefer the rhythmic language. They have a natural intuition for more pleasant-sounding rhythms and rhymes." (Zhou Wang Yue and Shao Bin, 2014: 151-153).

Ren's translation career spans more than seventy years. With the changes in age and era, as well as his own experience and translation experience, his translation style may remain consistent, which is where the translator's personal characteristics lie. However, the translation strategies adopted in the translation process and their translation ideas will definitely change either slightly or obviously. In the interview mentioned above, Ren believed that the language must be easy to understand when translating children's literature, but when asked whether he thought that "childish language is a basic principle in translating children's books," Mr Ren said, "Not exactly while making content understandable to children is important, it's also crucial to ensure that the language used is beautiful. Additionally, it's essential for children to be left with an aftertaste, or a lasting impression, after reading the content." Therefore, children's literature does not mean that the language should be completely superficial and infantile.

Additive reduplication, represented by the ABB form, is a beautiful linguistic feature of the Chinese language that reflects its unique figurative and phonetic beauty on a deeper level. Moreover, it also poses a higher level of reading difficulty, making it more beneficial for developing children's language abilities. Excluding the ABB words representing numbers (such as "一个个", "一群群", "一只只", etc.), the frequency of ABB words in the five works can be seen in the figure below.

Figure 4: Frequency of ABB Reduplicated Words in Ren's translations



1) And there, sure enough, was Andrew, walking as slowly and as casually as though nothing in the world was the matter;

- 一点不错，那儿是安德鲁，它慢腾腾地走着，好象什么事都不关心似的。（《随风而来的玛丽·波平斯阿姨》）
- 2) Andrew barked lazily but did not move.  
安德鲁懒洋洋地叫，可是不动。（《随风而来的玛丽·波平斯阿姨》）
- 3) "I don't think it's so clever to live on alone, forever and ever, in a great, big, half-empty house;"  
“我不认为这是什么聪明办法：孤零零一家人永远住在一座空荡荡的大房子里，”（《借东西的地下小人》）
- 4) "she said irritably, turning the drawer upside-down and picking over the spilled contents, 'With me hair like this!'"  
“她激动地说，把抽屉底朝天翻过来，弯腰捡起从里面撒下的东西，‘头发这么乱蓬蓬的！’”（《借东西的地下小人》）
- 5) It was soft and downy.  
它毛茸茸，软绵绵。（《吹小号的天鹅》）
- 6) They are sort of a dirty brownish-gray color, but very cute.  
他们都是脏兮兮的棕灰色，不过非常可爱。（《吹小号的天鹅》）
- 7) THE NEXT day was rainy and dark.  
第二天下雨，天色阴沉沉的。（《夏洛的网》）
- 8) His yard was cold and wet.  
它的猪栏又冷又湿嗒嗒。（《夏洛的网》）
- 9) On Wednesday, when the sky is blue/ And I have nothing else to do,  
星期三，天空蓝盈盈，可我闲着没事情，（《维尼小熊·阿嚏》）
- 10) "On Thursday, when it starts to freeze/ And hoar-frost twinkles on the trees,"  
“星期四，天寒又地冻，树上严霜亮晶晶，”（《维尼小熊·阿嚏》）
- 11) Little soft clouds played happily in a blue sky,  
轻飘飘的小云朵在蓝天上快活地嬉戏，（《维尼小熊·阿嚏》）

### 4.3 Affected by Readers

Children and adolescents aged 3-17 can be roughly divided into three stages based on their age: early childhood, childhood and adolescence. It is worth noting that children in different age groups also have significant differences in three areas: mental level, language development and aesthetic needs.

Table 2: Characteristics of Children's Literature at Different Stages  
(The table is quoted from Hu Xiangyao & Li Li, *Advanced Literature Translation*, Beijing: Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press, 2009)

#### 不同阶段的儿童文学特点

	心智特征	语言能力	作品体裁	作品特点
幼儿文学 (3-6岁)	形象思维占主导，智力处于蒙昧状态，注意力不能长期集中，想象力丰富	只能表达简单思想，词汇量小，不具备阅读能力	童谣、儿歌、故事、民间传说、诗歌、歌词	拟人化、文字简明、口语化、音韵优美
童年文学 (6-12岁)	接受小学教育，抽象思维开始发展，但形象思维仍占主导，对事物好奇心强	开始学习书面阅读和写作，口语与书面表达能力快速发展，词汇量增加	童话、寓言、神话、幻想小说、校园小说、童话剧	情节简单、主题清晰，篇幅较短，语言难度适中，想象力丰富，角色形象鲜明，节奏感强
少年文学 (13-17岁)	具备了抽象思维能力、推理能力、反思能力，自我意识增强，但形象思维仍有重要影响，产生青春周期性意识，对社会好奇心强	词汇量大大增加，表达能力明显加强，能区分词语间的细微差别，频繁使用抽象词汇，能理解复杂的语法结构，开始使用修辞手段	侦探小说、魔幻小说、历史小说、人物传记、冒险小说、校园小说和爱情小说	叙事技巧、场景描写、角色内心活动、作品主题和语言都日趋复杂，篇幅较长，但仍倾向于形象化，情节离奇，想象力丰富

Ren's translations of children's literature involve both fairy tales, fables, and children's novels, which belong to the category of childhood literature, and nursery rhymes and picture stories (i.e., picture books), which belong to the category of early childhood literature, the former being the main genre of children's literature translated by Ren. However, with the rise of children's picture books on the mainland, since 2002, Ren has devoted himself to translating nearly 200 picture books by famous British and American authors. Table 1 shows that the total number of reduplicated words in 《吹小号的天鹅》(1999) is the lowest, and the number of reduplicated words in the subsequent 《夏洛的网》(2004) and 《维尼小熊·阿嚏》(2007) has also decreased compared to the two translations before the 21st century; Figure 3 also shows that the frequency of the use of more superficial single-word reduplicated words has decreased significantly. During the translation period of 《维尼小熊·阿嚏》, illustrated books were on the rise in the Chinese children's literature market, and the original *Winnie-the-Pooh* had more illustrations and fewer full-text books, and the target readership was younger than the first four translations, which is closely related to the lowest number of ABB reduplicated words in 《维尼小熊·阿嚏》 as shown in Figure 4. Therefore, I think that Ren began to pay attention to the difference between these two types of children's literature for different age groups of children readers in his later translations, taking into account the differences in mental characteristics and language abilities between young children and children in childhood, and intentionally reducing the use of reduplicated words in his later translations of children's novels and fairy tales, and mainly reducing the frequency of using reduplicated words that are more juvenile. Children's literature is a special form of literature adapted to a special group of readers, and children of different ages have different language learning and appreciation abilities, so translators need to pay attention to this difference in order to better adapt to the needs of readers and achieve the initial expected effect of the work.

## 5. Conclusion

The study of the evolution of Ren's translations over time should be based on a historical perspective and a dialectical stance. The main reason for choosing microscopic reduplicated words as the object of this paper is that this is a better way to reflect the subjectivity of translators and the fluidity of translation ideas, regardless of whether such changes are conscious or unconscious, abrupt or gradual, active or passive. Through a combination of qualitative and quantitative analyses, the study finds that Ren's translations of children's literature have indeed changed, and the trend of the total number of reduplicated words and the number of different types of reduplicated words reveals that Ren regarded children, readers, as a whole large group in the 1980s and 1990s. In the twenty-first century, as new genres of children's literature flourished, and children's concepts changed, Ren's translations gradually showed a trend of "grading," with different features for different genres of children's literature for different age groups of readers. In the translations of children's stories published in the new century, Ren not only met the needs of the target readers but also paid more attention to the cultivation of children's linguistic aesthetics and language skills.

In 2021, Shanghai Translation Publishing House officially published 《任溶溶译文集》, which includes more than 80 classic works of nearly 40 foreign writers translated by Ren Rongrong. It is a concentrated display of his translation achievements and style. Ren is a great master of Chinese children's literature, but its importance has not been fully appreciated. In this paper, the author dynamically analyzes the linguistic changes in the translations of this great master of children's literature, starting from reduplicated words, in order to contribute to future studies of Ren's translations of children's literature and provide some reference for the translation of Chinese children's literature.

**Funding:** This research received was funded by the Department of Education of Zhejiang Province, China, grant number Y202249070.

**Conflicts of Interest:** The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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