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The Cultural Rethinking of Multidimensional Comparison between English and Chinese Lexicons—The Case of Word Families Containing "rén (人)" Morphemes

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Abstract

Based on Cultural Cognitive Linguistics, this paper investigates word families containing the morpheme "ren" (人 rén). Through multidimensional comparisons of word formation, semantic features, and socio-cultural connotations, it reveals the deep-seated differences in English and Chinese lexical systems and their underlying cultural-cognitive motivations. It is found that the Chinese word system with "human being" as its core is highly productive and regular, reflecting the Eastern comprehensive thinking and group-oriented view, while English relies on the derivation and recombination of multi-origin roots, reflecting the Western analytical thinking and individualistic tradition. At the semantic level, Chinese builds a hierarchical semantic field through the fixed pattern of "modifier + person", whereas English is characterized by multiple etymologies and a decentralized semantic structure. This study provides theoretical support for cross-cultural communication and language teaching from a cognitive perspective, and emphasizes the need to pay attention to the cultural rationale behind vocabulary in language teaching.

Keywords

English-Chinese Lexical Comparisons, Cultural Cognitive Linguistics, Word Families, Constructional Justifications, Cross-Cultural Semantics

1. Introduction

Vocabulary, as the fundamental unit of language and a carrier of cultural cognition, provides a critical lens for exploring the interplay between language and thought.

In the context of globalization and advancements in artificial intelligence, cross-linguistic comparative research has gained increasing prominence. English and Chinese, representing the Indo-European and Sino-Tibetan language families, respectively, exhibit distinct lexical systems that reflect not only linguistic differences but also profound cultural and cognitive divergences between Western and Eastern traditions (Pan, 2002). Cultural Cognitive Linguistics offers a novel framework for such inquiries, viewing linguistic symbols as products of cultural experiences and cognitive frameworks (Wen, 2024). Within this paradigm, analyzing word families centered on core morphemes, such as the Chinese morpheme "ren" (人, person), provides an effective approach to uncovering language-specific characteristics and their cultural-cognitive underpinnings.

The lexicalization of "ren" encapsulates cross-cultural differences in conceptualizing essential attributes, social roles, and value orientations. For example, Chinese compounds like rén mín (people) and rén xìng (humanity), built around "ren", emphasize collectivism and ethical dimensions. In contrast, English terms such as "human" and "person", derived from diverse etymological roots, underscore individual independence and subjective rights. These distinctions stem from typological differences in language structures and are deeply rooted in the philosophical traditions and social practices of Eastern and Western cultures. Thus, a multidimensional comparison of word families containing "ren" is essential for advancing linguistic typology and cultural cognition research.

Over the past century, English-Chinese lexical comparisons have yielded significant insights across three dimensions: morphological structure, semantic rationale, and metaphorical cognition (Xiong, 2012). Chinese relies heavily on compound constructions, characterized by high morpheme transparency and analyzability, which enhance word-formation efficiency compared to the phonetic-based English system, which depends on derivation and transformation (Zhang, 2007). Chinese vocabulary's semantic motivation is stronger due to its ideographic nature (Zhao, 2011; Yu & Li, 2011; Jiang, 2014). These differences reflect distinct cognitive patterns, with Chinese emphasizing holistic thinking and English favoring analytical approaches, shaped by the cultural and environmental contexts of their speakers (Mao, 2007; Liao, 2006; He, 2012). This study leverages these insights to explore how the "ren" morpheme illuminates the intricate relationship between language, culture, and cognition.

From the perspective of embodied philosophy, differences in English and Chinese metaphors reflect divergent cultural experiences (Hu, 2014). Ontology, methodology, and the history of a discipline are critical to its development. A focus on method and methodology signals disciplinary maturity. Contrastive linguistics, with over a century of history globally and in China, reveals a disparity: international scholars emphasize methodology and paradigms, while Chinese research, though improving in the last decade, remains relatively weak in these areas (Pan, 2019).

Despite significant progress, existing research faces limitations in theoretical

perspectives and materials:

1) Narrow Analytical Scope: Most studies focus on isolated analyses of morphology or semantics. While some explore cognitive differences, they lack a systematic integration of cultural cognitive frameworks, failing to connect word formation, semantic expansion, and cultural traditions into a cohesive analytical model. This limits deeper insights into language-culture interactions.

2) Lack of Systematic Corpus-Based Comparisons: Research often relies on fragmented word examples, neglecting large-scale corpus-based comparisons of word families. This hinders the identification of patterned cultural-cognitive features. Combining corpus methods with quantitative statistics is essential to enhance the credibility of findings.

3) Limited Integration of Recent Advances: Recent developments in Cultural Cognitive Linguistics (Wen, 2024) have not been fully incorporated into lexical comparison studies, causing theoretical interpretations to lag behind disciplinary progress.

Cultural Cognitive Linguistics, an emerging interdisciplinary field, centers on the interplay of language, culture, and cognition (Wen, 2024). It posits that culture shapes cognitive patterns through linguistic symbols, social practices, and norms, with language structure and usage reflecting distinct cultural-cognitive pathways. Integrating cognitive linguistics' focus on "mental experientiality" with cultural linguistics' emphasis on "cultural specificity", it addresses three key questions: How does language reflect and reinforce cultural concepts? How do cultural contexts shape language use and cognitive modeling? How do cross-cultural cognitive differences manifest in linguistic symbols? These differences extend beyond vocabulary to influence social interactions, behavioral logic, communication patterns, and social relations.

Grounded in Cultural Cognitive Linguistics, this study compiles a Chinese-English bilingual lexical corpus centered on the morpheme "ren" (人) from the International Chinese Language Standard for Chinese Language Education. Through quantitative statistical analysis, it compares word formation, semantic field structure, and cultural connotations to uncover the cultural-cognitive motivations behind English-Chinese lexical differences. This research contributes new evidence to language typology and cross-cultural studies. Additionally, it proposes the "Cultural Rationale Teaching Method", which integrates cultural explanations into language teaching to enhance learners' understanding and use of language, providing a theoretical foundation for cross-cultural language education.

2. Analysis of the Sources and Forms of the Research Corpus

To construct the research corpus, we digitized the 11,092 words from the Chinese Language Proficiency Level Standards vocabulary list as the initial dataset. From this, we extracted all bisyllabic words to form a base lexicon. These words were then morphemically decomposed, with homographs and homophones analyzed

and consolidated based on definitions from the Standardized Dictionary of Modern Chinese. This process yielded a database of 2897 core morphemes suitable for international Chinese language education. The morpheme "人" (rén, meaning "person") was selected for analysis, appearing in 104 words or phrases within the Grade Standard. Each instance was translated into English using the Modern Chinese Dictionary (7th edition) and the Oxford Advanced Learner's English-Chinese Dictionary to ensure semantic equivalence, resulting in 104 English equivalents. For example, "后代 (hòu dài)"was translated as "future generations" rather than the less precise "future".

To determine semantic field equivalence between Chinese and English vocabularies, the following criteria were applied:

Semantic Field Congruence: Ensuring both languages classify the target vocabulary into the same semantic category, such as "group belonging".

Semantic Field Verification: Validating translations using bilingual dictionaries (e.g., Modern Chinese-English Dictionary, Oxford Advanced English-Chinese Dictionary) and real-world examples of commonly used terms.

Cultural Cognizance Congruence: Evaluating cultural connotations and contextual usage to ensure comparability in cultural-cognitive frameworks. See Table 1 for further details.

Table 1. Vocabulary list.

rénshù 人数	number of people	rénqíng 人情	social obligations	huàirén 坏人	bad person
chángrén 常人	ordinary person	rénshì 人事	human resources	dòngrén 动人	touching
réngōng 人工	manual	rénshēn 人身	personal	kèren 客人	guest
jùrén 巨人	giant	rénwén 人文	humanities	huárén 华人	Chinese
rénmín 人民	people	réncái 人才	talented person	gèrén 个人	individual
lùrén 路人	passerby	rénwù 人物	character	shúrén 熟人	acquaintance
rénqún 人群	crowd	rénjiā 人家	household	qīnrén 亲人	close family member
yǒurén 友人	friend	zhuānrén 专人	specialist	dírén 敌人	enemy
rénlèi 人类	humankind	měirén 美人	beauty	shīrén 诗人	poet
sēngrén 僧人	monk	xiǎorén 小人	villain	qióngrén 穷人	poor person
rénshēng 人生	life	hòurén 后人	future generations	fūrén 夫人	madam
chóurén 仇人	enemy	jiārén 家人	family member	míngrén 名人	celebrity

Continued

rényuán 人 员	personnel	nánrén 男 人	man	chéngrén 成 人	adult
gǔrén 古人	historical figure	biérén 别 人	others	běnrén 本 人	myself
rénjiān 人 间	human world	bìngrén 病 人	patient	sīrén 私人	private
yòurén 诱 人	tempting	nǚrén 女人	woman	jūnrén 军 人	soldier
rénlì 人力	manpower	gōngrén 工 人	worker	mírén 迷人	charming
zhèngrén 证 人	witness	lǎorén 老 人	elderly	fùrén 富人	rich person
rénshì 人士	personage	àirén 爱人	lover	yìrén 艺人	entertainer
tārén 他人	other people	zhǔrén 主 人	master	jīngrén 惊 人	astonishing
rénquán 人 权	human right	dàren 大人	adult	gǎnrén 感 人	moving
chuánrén 传 人	successor	yǒurén 有 人	someone	ēnrén 恩人	benefactor
réncì 人次	visits	hǎorén 好 人	good person	yóurén 游 人	tourist
wénrén 文 人	scholar	rénpǐn 人品	moral character	shāngrén 商 人	businessman
rénshǒu 人 手	workforce	rénqì 人气	popularity	xíngrén 行 人	pedestrian
tóngrén 同 人	colleague	rénxuǎn 人 选	candidate	zhòngrén 众 人	everybody
réntǐ 人体	human body	néngrén 能 人	capable person	rénjūn 人均	per capita
lóngrén 聋 人	deaf person	rényuán 人 缘	popularity	diūrén 丢人	shameful
rénwéi 人 为	man-made	qíngrén 情 人	lover	rénkǒu 人 口	population
lièrén 猎人	hunter	rénzào 人 造	man-made	xīnrén 新 人	newcomer
rénxìng 人 性	human nature	wéirén 为 人	behavior	rénmen 人 们	people
piànrén 骗 人	deceiver	rénzhì 人质	hostage	mángrén 盲 人	blind person
réndào 人 道	humanity	xiàrén 吓 人	frightening	réngé 人格	personality
yòngrén 用 人	employment				

Among the 104 English equivalents containing “person”, 80 (76.9%) are single lexical units (e.g., “soldier”, “teacher”), while 24 (23.1%) are phrasal expressions

(e.g., "number of people," "future generations"). This distribution highlights structural differences: English employs both single words and phrases to express concepts related to "human being", whereas Chinese predominantly uses bisyllabic compounds. These differences reflect variations in lexicalization, grammatical structure, and cultural-cognitive patterns, as outlined below:

1) Differences in Lexicalization

Chinese frequently encodes concepts into single compounds through morpheme combination, reflecting its analytic nature and principle of linguistic economy (e.g., 人(rén) + 数(shù) = 人数(rénshù) "number of people"; 人(rén) + 情(qíng) = 人情(rénqíng) "social feeling"; 人(rén) + 权(quán) = 人权(rén quán) "human rights"). This high degree of lexicalization maximizes information within minimal linguistic units. In contrast, English, as an inflectional language, favors phrasal constructions and broader lexical categories, reflecting a Western analytical mindset (He, 2012). For instance, "human resources" uses an adjective-noun combination rather than a single term like "personnel", and "future generations" remains a phrase rather than a fully lexicalized word like "posterity", which is less common in spoken English. This reliance on syntactic flexibility allows English to combine concepts temporarily rather than solidifying them into single lexical items.

2) Constraints of Grammatical Type and Morphological Structure

English employs a robust system of derivational affixes (e.g., -er, -ity) to form new words, whereas Chinese lacks true affixes. Chinese bound morphemes (e.g., 机(jī) in 机会(jī huì) "opportunity") function as roots, and apparent "affixes" are reanalyzed independent morphemes within compounds (Zhang, 2007). Chinese word formation relies on root compounding, leveraging semantic associations and word order due to the absence of morphological markers (e.g., gender, number). For example, "manpower" (人 rén + 力 lì) and "humanity" (人 rén + 性 xìng) are semantically transparent compounds without grammatical markers. In contrast, English uses grammatical markers (e.g., prepositions, articles) and morphological changes (e.g., plurals, possessives) to convey meaning, enabling flexible phrasal constructions. For instance, "number of people" requires the preposition "of" to link "number" and "people", and "close family member" uses the adjective "close" to modify the noun phrase "family member". This morphosyntactic flexibility enhances precision but limits efficient lexicalization.

3) Mapping of Cognitive Modes and Cultural Thinking Chinese reflects a figurative, intuitive, and holistic thinking mode, encoding abstract concepts in concrete forms (He, 2012). For example, "enemy" 仇(chóu) + 人(rén)internalizes a "hostile relationship" as a lexical unit, and "scholar"文(wén) + 人(rén) categorizes professional identity directly, aligning with Confucian emphasis on stable social roles (e.g., "scholar, farmer, industrialist, businessman"). In contrast, English reflects analytical thinking, decomposing concepts through grammatical structures. For instance, "talented person" uses an adjective to modify "person", emphasizing individual attributes, and "historical figure" separates "historicity" from "figure" via an adjective-

noun structure. This aligns with Western cultural preferences for individual attributes and situational specificity.

The phrasalization of the concept of "human being" in English and the dominance of compound words in Chinese are essentially the result of the joint action of the two language types (isolation and flexion) and cultural cognitive modes (holistic and analytical). This difference not only reflects the superficial features of language structure, but is also deeply rooted in the deep-seated differences between the thinking traditions and value systems of the East and the West.

3. Comparison of Word Structures

3.1. Differences in Word Formation

Chinese compounds, which constitute over 90% of the lexicon, predominantly follow a "modifier + person" structure (e.g., "worker" 工人 gōng rén, "soldier" 军人 jūn rén, "scholar" 文人 wén rén). This pattern relies on direct morpheme combination, reflecting the analytic and ideographic nature of Chinese. Notably, the meaning of "人" (rén, person) in compounds is dynamic, evolving over time. For instance, during 20th-century industrialization, "worker" narrowed from a general term for laborers to specifically denote industrial workers. This study incorporates historical analysis, drawing on sources like the Shuowen Jiezi dictionary, to highlight the temporal evolution of compounds. In contrast, English derives 69% of its vocabulary through roots and affixes (e.g., "population" = popul- + -ation), reflecting its inflectional morphology and logical structure. Chinese adds modifiers to superordinate terms to denote new concepts, while English relies on contextual variation and diverse collocations to convey nuanced meanings.

1) Structural analysis of Chinese vocabulary

Among the 104 words containing "人" (rén), 36% position "人"(rén) as the first morpheme, typically in conjunctive or subject-predicate structures, while 64% place it as the final morpheme, often in modifier-head or verb-object forms. As the first morpheme, "人"(rén) emphasizes collectivity or universality (e.g., 人民 rén mín "people" denotes the general public with sociopolitical connotations). As the final morpheme, it is qualified by a preceding element specifying occupation, identity, or traits. Examples include:

Modifier-Head Compounds: "Worker" (工人 gōng rén) denotes industrial laborers, reflecting social division of labor; "hunter" (猎人 liè rén) identifies those who hunt for a living; "poet" (诗人 shī rén) highlights literary talent.

Complementary Compounds: "Witness" (证人 zhèng rén) describes someone providing legal testimony, with "人" complementing the action "witness".

Verb-Object Compounds: "Lover" (爱人 ài rén) positions "人" as the object of the action "love", indicating an intimate relationship.

Subject-Predicate Compounds: "Person of distinction" (杰人 jié rén) uses "人 rén" as the subject, with "杰 jié" (outstanding) describing exceptional qualities.

These compounds enrich Chinese vocabulary and reflect diverse social roles and cognitive categorizations. Historical and regional variations further shape

meaning. For example, "shāng rén" (商人, merchant) originally combined "shāng" (commerce) and "rén" (person) to denote traders in classical Chinese. In modern Chinese, it has solidified into a fixed occupational category alongside "scholar", "farmer", and "worker", reflecting a more complex social structure. Regionally, "shāng rén" is more prevalent in Guangdong, highlighting geographic lexical preferences.

2) Structural analysis of English vocabulary

Of the 104 English equivalents containing "person", 80 (76.9%) are single lexical units, and 24 (23.1%) are phrasal expressions, indicating a blend of lexical and phrasal structures to convey "person"-related concepts. These can be categorized as follows:

Derivatives (55 cases, 69%): Formed by adding affixes to roots related to "person". For example, "population" (popul- + -ation) and "popularity" (popul- + -ar + -ity) share the root popul- (people). Similarly, "humanity" (human + -ity) and "humanities" (human + -ities) derive from human. These derivatives draw from Latin, Greek, and Germanic roots, reflecting English's historical assimilation of foreign elements (Crystal, 2003).

Compounds (9 cases, 11%): Formed by combining roots, such as "businessman" (business + man) or "household" (house + hold). These compounds are morphologically transparent, with meanings inferable from their components (Qi et al., 2023).

Simple Words (17 cases, 21%): Indivisible lexical units with stable meanings over time, such as "guest" (from Old English gæst, meaning "foreign visitor") or "man" (narrowed from "human" to "adult male" in modern usage, reflecting evolving gender concepts).

Derivatives dominate (69%), leveraging a wide range of etymological roots (e.g., popul- yields multiple related terms). This reflects English's systematic lexical expansion through derivation, driven by historical events like the Norman Conquest and Renaissance, which enriched the language with foreign roots (Crystal, 2003). Simple words, though foundational, are less common (21%), indicating English's preference for derivation over creating new roots to accommodate new concepts (Bauer, 2001). For example, "cyberspace" uses the Greek root cyber- rather than a new simple word, reducing cognitive load and maintaining etymological continuity. Notably, word formation methods like truncation, contraction, acronymization, or innovation are absent in "person"-related vocabulary, reflecting the stability of this core concept. As a fundamental notion, "human being" has a long-established lexical system, with minimal need for new terms or meanings.

3.2. Differences in Word Order and Morphological Markers

The typological contrast between English and Chinese in word order and morphological marking significantly shapes the formation and semantic representation of words containing "human" morphemes, reflecting distinct cognitive and cultural frameworks.

1) Cognitive Encoding Differences in Word Order

Chinese compounds with "人" (rén, person) adhere to a "modifier + head" structure, with "人"(rén) typically positioned as the final morpheme (e.g., 工人 gōng rén "worker", 敌人 dí rén "enemy"). This reflects Chinese as a head-final, isolating language, where the modifier precedes the core morpheme to specify social attributes (e.g., occupation, morality), while "人" establishes the base category . This rigid rightward coreference projects a hierarchical cognitive structure, emphasizing stable categorization. In contrast, English exhibits flexible word order due to its inflectional nature and head-initial tendencies. Words related to "person" may use derivatives with fixed roots (e.g., "population" = popul- + -ation), cross-root derivations (e.g., "humanity" = human + -ity), or multi-word phrases (e.g., "workforce" = work + force). This variability allows dynamic adjustment of cognitive focus through morphological and syntactic manipulation, aligning with English's analytical structure (Bauer, 2001).

2) Functional Differentiation of Morphological Marker Systems

Chinese lacks inflectional morphology but employs quasi-derivational suffixes to expand the semantic scope of "人" (rén) compounds (Dong, 2005).These suffixes, categorized by function, include:

Occupational Markers: e.g., 员 (yuán) in 技术员(jì shù yuan) "technician", 家 (jiā) in 作家(zuò jiā) "writer", 手 (shǒu) in 猎手(liè shǒu) "hunter".

Attribute Markers: e.g., 者 (zhě) in 学者 (xué zhě) "scholar", 子 (zǐ) in 分子(fèn zǐ) "activist".

Evaluative Markers: e.g., 鬼 (guǐ) in 酒鬼(jiǔ guǐ) "alcoholic" (pejorative), 霸 (bà) in 学霸(xué bà) "schoolmaster" (positive).

These suffixes are highly productive, often carrying positive or negative connotations (e.g., 徒 tú has a pejorative tone), reflecting Chinese's tendency to encode semantic categories within compounds. In contrast, English uses a hybrid inflectional-derivational system. Derivational suffixes like "-er" (e.g., "teacher", "writer") are less semantically loaded, relying on the root to specify meaning, while inflectional suffixes like "-s" (plural) provide grammatical marking (Aronoff, 1976). This system prioritizes morphological economy, allowing flexible role specification through root-affix combinations.

3) Cultural-Cognitive Implications

These linguistic differences reflect distinct cognitive modes. Chinese, as an isolating language, achieves conceptual integration through morpheme juxtaposition and quasi-derivational suffixes, emphasizing semantic associations and holistic cognition. This aligns with collectivist cultural priorities, where social roles and relationships are lexicalized as stable categories (Lucy, 1997). English, as an inflectional language, relies on morphological decomposition and syntactic flexibility to segment categories, marking attributes grammatically to reflect analytical cognition and individualist priorities. For example, Chinese compounds like 工人 (gōng rén) "worker" encode group-oriented roles, while English phrases like "talented person" emphasize individual attributes through dynamic combinations.

The grammatical structures of both languages are not merely formal but symbolize cultural-cognitive patterns. Chinese's holistic encoding fosters group-oriented thinking, while English's conceptual decomposition reinforces recognition of individual attributes and abstract categories, shaping distinct communicative and cognitive frameworks (Lucy, 1997).

4. Semantic Contrast of Words

4.1. Comparison of the Conceptual Meaning of "Person"

The Chinese morpheme "人" (rén) is defined in *the Shuowen Jiezi* (p. 251) as "the most noble of heaven and earth's creations", depicted in oracle bone inscriptions as a laborer with arms hanging down, symbolizing labor and group collaboration. *The Modern Chinese Dictionary* (7th ed., p. 1096)[1] describes "人(rén)" as "a higher animal capable of creating and using tools for labor", emphasizing practical and social attributes rooted in survival and wisdom. This reflects traditional Chinese culture's holistic view of humans as inherently social and labor-driven.

In English, no single term encapsulates "person" comprehensively; instead, terms like "human," "person," and "man" disaggregate the concept. According to *the Oxford Learner's Dictionaries*[2], "human" denotes "of or connected with people, distinct from animals, machines, or gods," highlighting biological differences; "person" refers to "a human as an individual," emphasizing sociological individuality and Enlightenment-era rational subjectivity; and "man" specifies "an adult male," reflecting gender-specific and historical patriarchal connotations within the Indo-European linguistic tradition.

This semantic trichotomy in English contrasts with the unified Chinese "人(rén)" which integrates biological, social, and ethical attributes, revealing a cognitive divergence between Western analytical thinking and Chinese holistic thinking. Chinese compounds like 工人 (gōng rén) "worker" or 文人 (wén rén) "scholar" use a "modifier + head" structure to directly encode social roles (e.g., occupation, morality) without morphological segmentation. For instance, 人性(rén xìng) "human nature" juxtaposes "人" (rén，person) and "性 (xìng)" (nature) to convey essential human attributes without affixes, prioritizing holistic categorization. In English, terms like "worker" (work + -er) or "humanity" (human + -ity) rely on derivational morphology, reflecting analytical decomposition of concepts.

The term 文人 (wén rén, literati) exemplifies this contrast. Combining 文 (wén, writing) and 人 (rén, person), it historically denoted individuals proficient in poetry and literature during the medieval period, reflecting Confucian cultural ideals. In modern usage, it has broadened to a neutral "cultural worker," signaling shifts in professional roles and the declining prominence of Confucian values (Jiang, 2014). These semantic differences arise from distinct living habits, environments, behaviors, thought patterns, values, and beliefs, leading to semantic dislocations be-

[1]Modern Chinese Dictionary [现代汉语词典], 7th ed., s.v. "人" (Beijing: Commercial Press, 2016).
[2]Oxford Learner's Dictionaries. (n.d.). person, human, man. Retrieved April 23, 2025, from https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/.

tween English and Chinese vocabularies (Jiang, 2014).

4.2. Comparison of the Derived Meaning of "Man"

4.2.1. Derivation of "人" (rén) in Chinese

The Chinese morpheme "人" (rén) exhibits diverse derived meanings, as outlined in the Modern Chinese Dictionary (7th ed. These derivations reflect distinct cognitive perspectives and cultural values:

Derivation 1: Collective to Individual: "人" (rén) shifts from denoting a group (e.g., 人民 rén mín "people") to an individual (e.g., 个人 gè rén "individual"), reflecting a cognitive transition from collective identity to personal consciousness.

Derivations 2 and 3: Social Categorization: These refine "人(rén)" into subgroups with specific roles or traits (e.g., 工人 gōng rén "worker," 学者 xué zhě "scholar"), mirroring ancient China's hierarchical social structure and role-based cognition.

Derivation 4: Otherness: "人" (rén) denotes distinction between self and others (e.g., 外人 wài rén "outsider"), highlighting awareness of social boundaries.

Derivations 5 and 6: Moral and Structural Attributes: These focus on positive traits or components of human identity (e.g., 人性 rén xìng "human nature," 人品 rén pǐn "character"), emphasizing Confucian moral values and ethical orientation.

Derivation 7: Metonymic Reference: "人" (rén) represents the whole human body via distinctive traits (e.g., 人力 rén lì "manpower"), underscoring utility and function.

The derivation of "人" (rén) exhibits:

a) High Integration and Productivity: Semantic extension occurs through compound words (e.g., 人性 rén xìng "human nature," 人情 rén qíng "human feelings") rather than single morphemes, with "人" (rén) as a core morpheme enabling flexible combinations. This implicit derivation encodes attributes directly within compounds.

b) Ethical and Relational Features: Derivations reflect transitions from group to individual (e.g., 各人 gè rén "each person" to 个人 gè tǐ "individual"), entity to attribute (e.g., 人力 rén lì "manpower" to 人性 rén xìng "humanity"), and concrete to abstract (e.g., 人体 rén tǐ "human body" to 人格 rén gé "personality"). These often carry moral connotations (e.g., 圣人 shèng rén "saint," 好人 hǎo rén "good person"), aligning with Confucian emphasis on moral cultivation and social harmony.

4.2.2. Derivation of "Person," "Human," and "Man" in English

The English term "person" has three primary definitions (Oxford Learner's Dictionaries, n.d.):

Derivation 1: A general reference to a human being, emphasizing universality.

Derivation 2: A person with a specific status or role (e.g., "businessperson"), akin to Chinese derivations categorizing social roles.

Derivation 3: A grammatical category (e.g., "third person"), reflecting self-other

distinctions in linguistic structure.

The term "human" has two definitions:

Derivation 1: Emphasizes human weaknesses (e.g., "human error"), promoting tolerance for flaws, unlike Chinese culture's focus on positive traits.

Derivation 2: Highlights interpersonal connection (e.g., "human touch"), emphasizing relational bonds.

The term "man" has 13 definitions, categorized as:

Derivation 1: General reference to humanity (e.g., "mankind").

Derivation 2: An individual (e.g., "every man").

Derivations 3, 5, 7, 12: Specific identities (e.g., "businessman", "clergyman").

Derivations 4, 11: Character or quality (e.g., "man of honor").

Derivations 8, 9, 10: Interpersonal relations or address (e.g., "my man").

Derivation 6: Military or labor roles (e.g., "man-at-arms").

Derivation 13: Game-related roles (e.g., "pawn").

English derivations exhibit distinct characteristics:

a) "Man"—Historical Priority and Semantic Differentiation: Originating from Old English mann (humanity), "man" evolved to denote "adult male" due to patriarchal influences, accumulating diverse derivations (e.g., "soldier," "fireman," "superman"). Its semantic network reflects gendered labor divisions and heroic narratives, with extensive metaphor (e.g., "man of the hour" for prominence) and metonymy (e.g., "the man" for authority) (Taylor, 1989).

b) "Human" and "Person"—Recent Origin and Semantic Focus: Derived from Latin humanus and persona, these terms are constrained by their etymological roots. "Human" is used in abstract or ethical contexts (e.g., "human nature," "humanitarian"), focusing on universal traits or weaknesses. "Person" serves legal (e.g., "juridical person") or grammatical functions (e.g., "first person"), limiting its semantic expansion.

4.2.3. Cultural Differentiation of English-Chinese Semantic Derivation Paths

The diversity of derivations of English "man" is closely related to its historical depth, gender culture and analytical thinking, while the semantic expansion of Chinese "人(rén)" is shaped by ethical traditions and the mechanism of compound word formation. For a detailed comparison, see Table 2.

Table 2. Comparison of the perception of English "man" and Chinese "人(rén)".

dimension (math.)	English "man"	Chinese "man"
semantic focus	Individual role differentiation (occupation, gender, power)	Integration of group relations (ethics, social networks)
derivation mechanism	metaphorical or metonymic dominance	compound compound composition dominant (math.)
cultural code	Individualism vs. Functionalism	Collectivism and moralism

The distinct ideographic systems of English and Chinese reflect not only struc-

tural differences in their lexical systems but also deeper contrasts in cultural cognition, role definition, and value orientation. These differences manifest in language typology and thinking modes, shaping semantic derivation and expression.

English, as an inflectional language, relies on morphological changes to derive specific meanings (e.g., "-man" in "policeman" or "fireman" denotes precise roles). This specificity enables concrete, targeted descriptions of objects or individuals, aligning with analytical cognition that emphasizes precision and individuation. In contrast, Chinese, as an isolating language, achieves derivation through word order and semantic correlation, producing generalized and imaginative meanings. For example, 爱人 (ài rén) can denote "spouse" or broadly "loved one," reflecting a flexible, context-dependent interpretation. This generalization embodies the Chinese cultural practice of "observing things and capturing their essence" (观物取象 guān wù qǔ xiàng) and "grouping by shared traits" (类同取象 lèi tóng qǔ xiàng), prioritizing commonalities and holistic cognition over specific delineation.

English analytical thinking drives semantic expansion by subdividing roles and functions, creating specialized terms like "chairman" or "spokesman" that highlight individual roles within specific contexts. This reflects a Western tendency to decompose concepts into discrete attributes. Conversely, Chinese integrative thinking generalizes attributes through morpheme juxtaposition, as seen in compounds like 文人 (wén rén, literati) or 军人 (jūn rén, soldier), which encapsulate broad social or occupational categories without morphological segmentation. This holistic approach integrates diverse attributes into unified lexical units, aligning with Chinese cultural emphasis on interconnectedness and collective identity.

These linguistic differences underscore broader cultural-cognitive divides: English prioritizes individual roles and precise categorization, while Chinese emphasizes collective attributes and flexible, context-driven meanings. This interplay of language structure and thought patterns shapes how each culture conceptualizes and communicates the notion of "man".

4.3. Semantic Field Analysis

Of the 104 Chinese words containing the morpheme "人" (rén), 51 (49.0%) form a strict contextual semantic field with "人" (rén) as the final morpheme, adhering to a "modifier + head" structure (e.g., 工人 gōng rén， "worker," 亲人 qīn rén, "relative"). These compounds reflect formal regularity and can be categorized into six semantic fields: social roles, occupational identities, interpersonal relationships, moral evaluations, physical characteristics, and cultural attributes.

4.3.1. Semantic Categories of Chinese "人" (rén) Compounds

1) Social Roles

Identity Attributes: Defined by physical state, age, or gender (e.g., 常人 cháng rén "ordinary people," 成人 (chéng rén) "adult", 老人 (lǎo rén) "elderly", 男人 (nán rén) "man", 女人 (nǚ rén) "woman", 聋人 (lóng rén) "deaf person", 病人 (bìng rén) "sick person").

Group Affiliation: Emphasizes cultural heritage, kinship, or collective identity (e.g., 中国人 (zhōng guó rén) "Chinese", 后代 (hòu dài) "descendants", 人类 (rén lèi) "homo sapiens").

2) Occupational Identities

Traditional Occupations: Directly constructed as "occupation + 人(rén)," reflecting social division of labor (e.g., 军人 (jūn rén) "soldier," 工人 (gōng rén) "worker," 商人 (shāng rén) "merchant," 猎人 (liè rén) "hunter," 诗人 (shī rén) "poet," 艺术家 (yì shù jiā) "artist").

Functional Roles: Defined by social responsibilities or functions (e.g., 证人 (zhèng rén) "witness," 继承人 (jì chéng rén) "heir," 主人 (zhǔ rén) "master").

3) Interpersonal Relationships

Kinship: Denotes close bonds via blood or marriage (e.g., 亲人 (qīn rén) "relative," 家人 (jiā rén) "family member").

Social Relations: Defined by emotional or interest-based interactions (e.g., 朋友 (péng yǒu) "friend," 敌人 (dí rén) "enemy," 熟人 (shú rén) "acquaintance," 外人 (wài rén) "outsider," 恩人 (ēn rén) "benefactor").

4) Moral Evaluations

Positive Evaluations: Integrate morality, ability, or appearance (e.g., 好人 (hǎo rén) "good person," 能人 (néng rén) "capable person," 美人 (měi rén) "beautiful person").

Negative Evaluations: Highlight moral flaws or misbehavior (e.g., 坏人 (huài rén) "bad person," 小人 (xiǎo rén) "villain," 骗子 (piàn zǐ) "cheater").

5) Physical Characteristics

Physical Status: Based on economic or bodily differences (e.g., 巨人 (jù rén) "giant," 穷人 (qióng rén) "poor person," 富人 (fù rén) "rich person").

Behavioral Characteristics: Defined by temporary behavioral states (e.g., 行人 (xíng rén) "pedestrian," 旅人 (lǚ rén) "traveler," 路人 (lù rén) "passerby").

6.Cultural Attributes

Literary and Historical Imagery: Reflects Confucian perceptions of history and gender roles (e.g., 古人 (gǔ rén) "ancient person," 文人 (wén rén) "literati," 夫人 (fū rén) "lady").

Social Construction: Relies on social consensus or emotional ties (e.g., 名人 (míng rén) "celebrity," 爱人 (ài rén) "lover," 心上人 (xīn shàng rén) "beloved").

4.3.2. Cultural and Cognitive Implications

The semantic categorization of Chinese "人 (rén)" compounds reflects the interplay of cultural-cognitive patterns and linguistic structures. This categorization captures the complexity of social reality and diverse definitions of "person" in Chinese culture, spanning morality, occupation, and kinship. It echoes the traditional hierarchical framework of "Shi, Nong, Gong, Shang" (scholars, farmers, artisans, merchants), where social identities are constructed to express group relations and delineate in-group/out-group boundaries (Blom & Gumperz, 2000).

The Chinese language's compound structure creates a semantic network with hierarchical and ethical permeability, embodying integrative thinking that prioritizes shared traits and holistic categorization.

In contrast, English semantic fields for "person"-related terms rely on root derivation, resulting in discrete, individualized categories. For example, "individuality" derives from roots like individual or personality, and "group" from populace or population, lacking unified morphological markers. This discreteness reflects analytical thinking, which segments categories into specific attributes or functions (e.g., "spokesman," "chairman"). The clustered, interconnected semantic fields of Chinese contrast with the discrete, functionalized fields of English, providing a critical paradigm for cross-cultural linguistic research.

5. Comparison of Cultural Connotations of Words

5.1. Mindset

The word formation of Chinese compounds containing "人" (rén) reflects the emphasis on group relations in East Asian culture, embodying integrative thinking. Joint compounds like 人民 (rénmín, "people"), 群众 (qúnzhòng, "masses"), and 人类 (rénlèi, "humankind") integrate "人" with morphemes denoting collectivity (e.g., 民 "citizens," 众 "group," 类 "kind"). These structures dissolve individual identity into a collective category, prioritizing group-oriented cognition. This "group-first" pattern, rooted in the Shangshu-Tai Oath principle that "the people are the foundation of the state," emphasizes the individual's value within the collective without morphological or logical subordination.

When English expresses concepts related to "human being", it relies more on abstract roots, affixes and logical combinations of different linguistic components, and derivatives such as "humanity" and "individual" break down the concept of "human being" through combinations of roots and abstract suffixes (e.g. "-ity" and "-ual"). Derivatives such as "humanity" and "individual" decompose the concept of "person" into a hierarchical relationship between attributes and individuals through the combination of root words and abstract suffixes (e.g. "-ity" and "-ual"). The concept of "person" is broken down into a hierarchy of attributes and individuals. The etymological composition of " individual "directly maps the Western philosophical perception of individual independence. Therefore, although the meaning of many words in English centers around "person", their word formation does not focus on the word "person", but follows the root of the word directly.

The Chinese term 天下 (tiānxià, "world," literally "heaven and earth") situates humans within a holistic cosmic framework, implying the Confucian ideal of "unity of heaven and man" (天人合一), while the English word "human world" establishes the relationship between human beings and the world through the genitive structure. The former implies "heaven and earth". The former implies the holistic view of "the unity of heaven and man", while the latter embodies the analytical thinking of "subject-object dichotomy", which is different from the "relationship-based" and "entity-based" philosophical traditions of China and the

West. This is closely related to the difference between the "relationship-based" and "entity-based" philosophical traditions of China and the West.

5.2. Cultural Perspective

The Confucian ethic is particularly significant in shaping the Chinese word family "人" (rén). Confucianism has always emphasized the concepts of "harmony among the people" (人和) and "benevolence and love for the people" (仁爱), stressing the wholeness of human beings and all living things, as well as of human beings and the heavens and the earth. The term 仁人 (rénrén, "benevolent person") embodies the core Confucian idea of "the benevolent loves others" (仁者爱人) and emphasizes the love and care among people. The term 圣人 (shèngrén, "sage") represents Confucianism's highest pursuit of an ideal personality and embodies the highest state of moral cultivation. The term 贤人 (xiánrén, "virtuous person") highlights Confucianism's esteem for those who are both virtuous and talented. Together, these words construct the Confucian cognitive system of social roles and moral norms, and realize the concrete expression of ethical values through the lexical structure. In contrast, the etymological evolution of the English word "person" reflects a different cultural trajectory: its Latin etymology, "persona", originally referred to a theatrical mask, which was later developed into the concept of "persona" through Christian theology, and eventually became the concept of "persona" in the legal system. The Latin word "persona" originally referred to a theater mask, which was later developed by Christian theology into the concept of "personhood", and eventually derived the meaning of "personhood" in the legal context. This semantic expansion from role-playing to abstract legal rights reflects the tradition of recognizing "person" as the subject of rights in Western culture.

Taoist thought is reflected in linguistic cognition through words such as 真人 (zhēnrén, "true person") and 仙人 (xiānrén, "immortal person"). The term "true person" emphasizes the return to the truth, and the combination of "true" and "person" in its composition directly corresponds to the philosophical proposition of Zhuangzi that "not to be separated from the truth is to be called the most human". The combination of "true" and "person" in its construction directly corresponds to the philosophical proposition of Zhuangzi that "without departing from the true, one is called the supreme human being. The English word "individual" emphasizes the indivisibility of the individual, and the combination of its root "divid-" and the negative prefix "in-" implies that "rationality" in the Enlightenment thought is the key element in the concept of "rationality". The combination of its root "divid-" and negative prefix "in-" implies the value presupposition of "rational individual" in Enlightenment thought, which is in sharp contrast to the group orientation of Chinese.

5.3. Social Experience

The kinship system of the Chinese "人" (rén) word family deeply reflects the social structure (Huang & Jia, 2000). For example, words such as 家人 (jiārén, "family

member") and 亲人 (qīnrén, "relative") transform blood relations into social identity labels, while expressions such as 堂亲 (tángqīn, "cousin's family") further extend the kinship network to the level of social relations. The English word "cousin" integrates multiple relationships such as cousin, and its semantic generalization weakens the difference in closeness and reflects the individual-based kinship perception (Guo & Herrmann-Pillath, 2019). In standard Mandarin Chinese, the term 亲人 (qīnrén) is employed exclusively to denote blood relatives. In contrast, the term 亲戚 (qīnqi) in the Min Nan dialect encompasses not only blood relatives but also more distant relatives, thereby reflecting the regional specificity of the family unit. The polysemy of the English term "family" does not exhibit this distinction, instead signifying an individualistic cultural approach to familial relationships.

Chinese occupational terms like 工人 (gōngrén, "worker"), 诗人 (shīrén, "poet"), and 商人 (shāngrén, "merchant") follow the "modifier + 人" pattern, rooted in the Zhou dynasty's Zhou Li tradition of "Baigong" (hundred artisans). These compounds emphasize social roles and division of labor, defining individuals by their societal contributions and cultural inheritance. In contrast, the English term "worker," derived from the root work, originally connoted "religious asceticism" but narrowed to "laborer" post-Industrial Revolution, reflecting a shift from sacred to secular labor. This evolution highlights English's focus on instrumental, functional aspects of occupations, contrasting with the stable, socially embedded roles in Chinese vocabulary.

Chinese "人" (rén) compounds encode social experience through stable, group-oriented categories, reflecting integrative thinking and a collectivist social structure. English terms, shaped by analytical thinking, prioritize individualized, functional roles, with semantic shifts driven by historical changes like industrialization. These lexical differences underscore contrasting cultural priorities: Chinese emphasis on social harmony and role stability versus Western focus on individual agency and instrumental behavior.

6. The implementation of the Cultural Justification Teaching Methodology

The cultural justification is contingent on the linguistic proficiency and objectives of the learner. For novices, the cultural justification is elucidated in a manner that merely provides a rationale for the cultural elements, omitting any cultural analysis. The justification may be provided in the learner's native language to enhance comprehension and learning efficacy. For advanced learners or those with specific objectives, the cultural rationale is meticulously articulated in a targeted manner, complemented by cultural instruction to foster a comprehensive understanding of Chinese traditional culture, facilitating a holistic perception of the Chinese language. This approach is conducive to the symbiotic development of language and culture (Yang, 2015). The cultural justification teaching method aims to promote profound comprehension of the target language by elucidating the cultural factors

influencing language learning. The method is structured as follows:

The following discourse will initiate the cultural awareness programme by introducing the cultural concepts underpinning specific vocabulary. For instance, the collectivist ethos inherent in the Chinese concept of "人" (rén) will be juxtaposed with the individualistic tradition embodied by the English term "individual".

The following discourse will provide an analysis of the manner in which compounds are formed in the Chinese language, with a particular focus on the relationship between compounds and cultural concepts. The discussion will draw parallels between compounds in the Chinese language and compounds in English, with a view to elucidating the relationship between compounds and cultural concepts.

The construction of the semantic network is achieved through the analysis of the cultural interconnection of vocabulary, as illustrated by the contrast in the cultural significance of 家人 (jiārén, "family member") and "relative" in different cultural contexts.

Scenario-based application practice: The design of cross-cultural interaction tasks (e.g. role-play and interpreting practice) assists learners in applying cultural theory knowledge in real-world contexts.

The utilisation of real-world cases in academic discourse:

In the context of a lecture on the concept of 文人 (wénrén, "literati"), a term which is often translated as "scholar", it is recommended that students analyse the etymology of the word, specifically the meaning of the characters "wen" and "ren". This should be compared with the English word "scholar" to highlight the differences in perception of the term in both Western and Eastern cultures. The students should then be encouraged to write a short essay comparing the image of the 文人 in Chinese and "scholar" in English, with a view to deepening their understanding of the cultural nuances of these terms.

7. Conclusion

This study employs a comparative linguistic approach to analyze the lexical systems of Chinese and English, focusing on words containing the morpheme "人" (rén) and their English equivalents. The investigation reveals significant disparities in word formation, semantic structure, and cultural connotations, reflecting distinct cognitive and cultural frameworks.

The investigation reveals that, in the process of constructing words, Chinese language employs a highly systematic and productive approach. In contrast, English relies on a more diverse and dynamic process involving the formation of words from multiple roots, resulting in a more varied and complex lexicon.

In terms of semantic structure, Chinese "人" compounds adopt a "modifier + 人" pattern, creating a nuanced semantic field. In contrast, English-related compounds exhibit a greater diversity in terms of their semantic content, reflecting a combination of both a more abstract and a more concrete mode of thought. These

semantic differences can be attributed to the influence of a more holistic cultural perspective on language formation, as opposed to a more analytical approach.

The investigation also uncovers that the lexical systems of Chinese and English reveal distinct cultural and linguistic characteristics. Chinese compounds, for instance, exhibit a tendency towards narrower semantic fields, reflecting a more insular cultural perspective. In contrast, English compounds demonstrate a greater capacity to incorporate external sources, reflecting a more open and receptive cultural attitude. These dynamic changes in lexical systems demonstrate that languages are not merely vehicles for communication, but also products of social and cultural change.

This study offers novel insights into the interactions between different cultures and the teaching of languages. In the process of acquiring a second language, it is important to emphasise the cultural models underlying vocabulary learning. This approach helps learners to understand the deeper cultural reasons for word usage and the networks of meaning they create. In future studies, researchers should explore other core vocabulary groups and combine experiments with corpora. This will help to verify the impact of cultural models on the use of vocabulary.

The present study puts forward the "cultural justification teaching method", which provides a new theoretical basis for cross-cultural communication and language teaching. The aforementioned method emphasises the integration of a cultural cognition model into language teaching, thereby assisting learners in comprehending the cultural motivations behind vocabulary. However, the study is subject to certain limitations, such as the size of the vocabulary database, which is currently limited. In the future, a larger-scale parallel vocabulary database and cognitive experiment method will be able to verify the study's conclusions. Furthermore, research into other core linguistic elements will facilitate a more profound understanding of the mechanisms of cross-cultural interaction.

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