



The meanings of POWER in English and Chinese: a corpus-based contrastive lexical description

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Why POWER ?

A core concept in

- Politeness theory by Brown and Levinson (1987)
- (Critical) discourse analysis
- Workplace interaction and management
- ...

The East-West divide in the conceptualisation of POWER:
e.g., Hwang (1987)



alamy stock photo

K502CW
www.alamy.com

German chancellor
Angela Merkel at the
Fruit trade, Sunday
8 Sep 2017

Iron Lady (2012) film - opening
scene with the milk price

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wq7-XeT9n_M



Preparatory work: OED

power [*mass noun*]

1. the ability or capacity **to do something** or act in a particular way: *the power of speech* | *I will do everything in my power to help you* | (**powers**) *his powers of concentration*.

2. the capacity or **ability to direct or influence the behaviour of others** or the course of events: *a political process that offers people power over their own lives* | *she had me in her power*.

- political or social authority or control, especially that exercised by a government: *the party had been in power for eight years*.

- authority that is given or delegated to a person or body: *police do not have the power to stop and search*.

- the military strength of a state: *the sea power of Venice*.

- [*count noun*] a state or country, especially one viewed in terms of its

international influence and military strength: *a great colonial power*.

- [*count noun*] a person or organization that is strong or influential within a particular context: *he was a power in the university*.

- [*count noun*] a supernatural being, deity, or force: *the powers of darkness*.

- (**powers**) (in traditional Christian angelology) the sixth-highest order of the ninefold celestial hierarchy.

- [*as modifier*] *informal* denoting something associated with people who hold authority and influence, especially in the context of business or politics: *a red power tie*.

- [*with modifier*] used in the names of movements aiming to enhance the status of a specified group: *gay power*.

[...mathematics, physics...]

Preparatory work: SUMO/WordNet

"power" has **18** senses.

115472081 "&%PhysicalDimension of power, [W]."

115409665 "&%PhysicalDimension of power, [W]."

105190804 possession of **controlling influence**; "the deterrent power of nuclear weapons"; "the power of his love saved her"; "his powerfulness was concealed by a gentle facade".

115347249 "&%PhysicalDimension of power, [W]."

106812417 a mathematical notation indicating the number of times a quantity is multiplied by itself.

105616246 possession of the qualities (especially mental qualities) required to do something or get something done; "danger heightened his powers of discrimination".

111453016 (physics) the rate of doing work; measured in watts (= joules/second).

113945102 (of a government or government official) holding an office means being in power; "being in office already gives a candidate a great advantage"; "during his first year in office";

"during his first year in power"; "the power of the president".

115378457 "&%PhysicalDimension of power, [W]."

115308812 "&%PhysicalDimension of power, [W]."

115321549 "&%PhysicalDimension of power, [W]."

109840217 a very wealthy or powerful businessman; "an oil baron".

115533819 "&%PhysicalDimension of power, [W]."
(entry from SUMO termFormat and documentation) .

105030680 physical strength.

108177592 a state powerful enough to influence events throughout the world.)

110461424 one possessing or exercising power or influence or authority; "the mysterious presence of an evil power"; "may the force be with you"; "the forces of evil".

115502945 "&%PhysicalDimension of power, [W]."

115440873 "&%PhysicalDimension of power, [W]."

WordNet: the **noun** "power" has **14 senses**.

[115409665](#) "&%PhysicalDimension of power, [W]." (entry from SUMO termFormat and documentation) .

SUMO Mappings: [Power](#) (equivalent mapping)

[105190804](#) possession of **controlling influence**; "the deterrent power of nuclear weapons"; "the power of his love saved her"; "his powerfulness was concealed by a gentle facade".

SUMO Mappings: [SubjectiveAssessmentAttribute](#) (subsuming mapping)

[115347249](#) "&%PhysicalDimension of power, [W].".

SUMO Mappings: [Power](#) (equivalent mapping)

[106812417](#) a mathematical notation indicating the number of times a quantity is multiplied by itself.

SUMO Mappings: [ExponentiationFn](#) (equivalent mapping)

[105616246](#) possession of the **qualities** (especially mental qualities) required to do something or get something done; "danger heightened his powers of discrimination".

SUMO Mappings: [Process](#) (subsuming mapping)

[111453016](#) (physics) the rate of doing work; measured in watts (= joules/second).

SUMO Mappings: [Watt](#) (equivalent mapping)

[113945102](#) (of a **government** or government official) holding an **office means** being in power; "being in office already gives a candidate a great advantage"; "during his first year in office"; "during his first year in power"; "the power of the president".

SUMO Mappings: [Position](#) (subsuming mapping)

[115378457](#) "&%PhysicalDimension of power, [W].".

SUMO Mappings: [Power](#) (equivalent mapping)

[115308812](#) "&%PhysicalDimension of power, [W].".

SUMO Mappings: [Power](#) (equivalent mapping)

[115321549](#) "&%PhysicalDimension of power, [W].".

SUMO Mappings: [Power](#) (equivalent mapping)

[109840217](#) a very wealthy or powerful **businessman**; "an oil baron".

SUMO Mappings: [BusinessPerson](#) (subsuming mapping)

[105030680](#) physical strength.

SUMO Mappings: [SubjectiveAssessmentAttribute](#) (subsuming mapping)

[108177592](#) a state powerful enough to **influence** events throughout the world.

SUMO Mappings: [Nation](#) (subsuming mapping)

[110461424](#) one possessing or exercising **power or influence or authority**; "the mysterious presence of an evil power"; "may the force be with you"; "the forces of evil".

SUMO Mappings: [SubjectiveAssessmentAttribute](#) (equivalent mapping)

SUMO

Noun Synset: 105190804

SUMO Mappings: [SubjectiveAssessmentAttribute](#) (subsuming mapping)

Words: power, powerfulness

Babelnet

<https://babelnet.org/synset?word=bn:00063940n&details=1&lang=EN&orig=power>

權力, 权力,

權力 权力 權限 权限 勢力 势力, 力,

國際關係權力,

强大,

强盛,

社会力量,

社会权力

power, powerfulness,
political power, Bases of
power, Counter-power,
Counterpower, Personal
power, Political authority,
Positions of power, Powah,
Power control theory,
Power in interpersonal
communication, Power
control theory, Public power,
Social power

This study

Aim

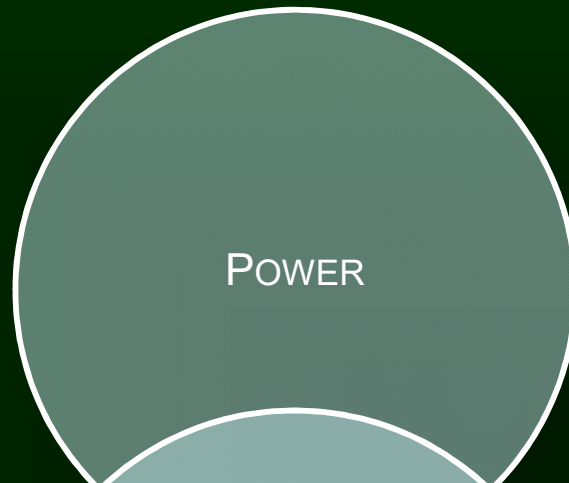
to describe POWER in English and its *correspondents* in Chinese in terms of the meaning, associated words and situations

We set out with some *ambitious* questions:

- Where is power (derived) from?
- What does power consist of?
- Power is used to do what?
- ...

Lexical items in E and C

- English



POWER

Associate
words

- Chinese



權力
能力
力量...

Associate
words

This study

We are **most interested** in the senses about:

- interpersonal power relations (人)
 - esp. one's ability to meditate (hinder or facilitate) the desire of the other (Emerson 1962)
- one's ability to influence (the course of) matters (事)
- one's own ability, quality and competence (自己)

rather than other senses, e.g., mathematical, electrical, physical ...

Corpus of the English Web

enTenTen15: texts collected from the Internet, with sophisticated spam removal.

TreeTagger using Penn TreeBank tagset with SkE modifications.

		Subcorpus	Tokens	%
Counts	Tokens	18,389,070,604	Australian domain .au	392,078,353 2.132
	words	15,703,895,409	Canadian domain .ca	6,282,537 0.034
	Sentences	856,428,595	EU domain .eu	404,936,717 2.202
			Indian domain .in	384,789,705 2.092
	Paragraphs	351,102,999	New Zealand domain .nz	170,201,163 0.926
			South African domain .za	68,567,489 0.373
	Documents	37,810,139	UK domain .uk	829,905,145 4.513
			US domain .us	213,336,507 1.16

Corpus of the Chinese Web

zhTenTen17: Data was crawled by the SpiderLing web spider in August and November 2017.

The corpus was processed with Stanford NLP Core Tools.

Tokens	16,593,146,196	Subcorpus	Tokens	%
words	13,531,331,169	Chinese Wikipedia 2017	439,188	0.003
Sentences	667,201,792	Chinese domain .cn	6,882,294,281	41.477
Paragraphs	280,848,826	Hong Kong domain .hk	14,218,859	0.086
Documents	40,233,300	Taiwan domain .tw	29,656,977	0.179

Method

Using Sketch Engine (SkE) and English and Chinese corpora

A) Global searches

- Word sketch, thesaurus

B) Specific searches

We attempted to:

- pin down *situations* in which power relations manifest
- by searching phrases or word collocations to “locate” such situations
- in both English and Chinese with comparable corpora

Word sketch

English: POWER

- enTenTen15

- Power as noun 5,900,225, verb with “power” as object

- enTenTen13

Chinese: 权力 [link](#)

enTenTen15

verb with “power” as object

harness	23,554	8.86	...
harness the power of			
exercise	23,212	8.7	...
exercise power			
generate	21,497	7.92	...
power generated			
wield	10,301	7.71	...
wield power			
seize	9,733	7.52	...
seized power			
have	230,444	7.47	...
have the power			
lose	17,284	7.32	...
lost power			
gain	13,359	7.25	...
gain power			
supply	9,319	7.21	...
supply power			
leverage	7,287	7.09	...

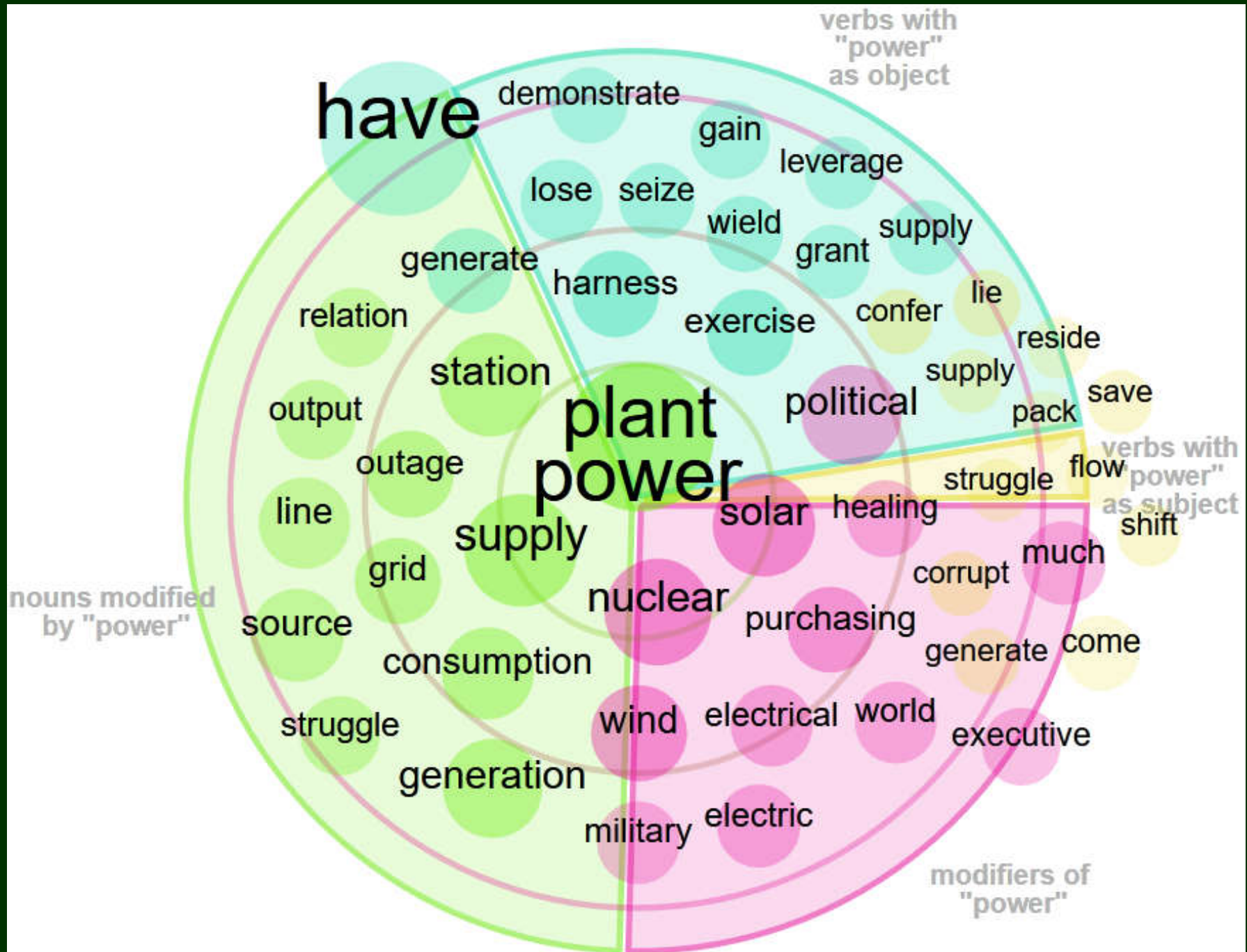
enTenTen13

modifiers of "power"	nouns modified by "power"	verbs with "power" as object	verbs with "power" as subject
solar ... solar power	plant ... power plants	harness ... harness the power of	level ... power leveling
nuclear ... nuclear power	supply ... power supply	exercise ... generate ...	corrupt ... power corrupts absolutely
electrical ... electrical power	outage ... power outages	stay ... staying power	lie ... power lies in
wind ... wind power	consumption ... power consumption	wield ...	steer ... the power steering
purchasing ... purchasing power of	station ... power stations	gain ... gain power	supply ... power supplies
electric ... electric power	generation ... power generation	have ... lose ...	confer ... of the powers conferred
political ... political power	grid ... the power grid	possess ...	generate ... power generating
healing ...	source ...	underestimate ...	pack

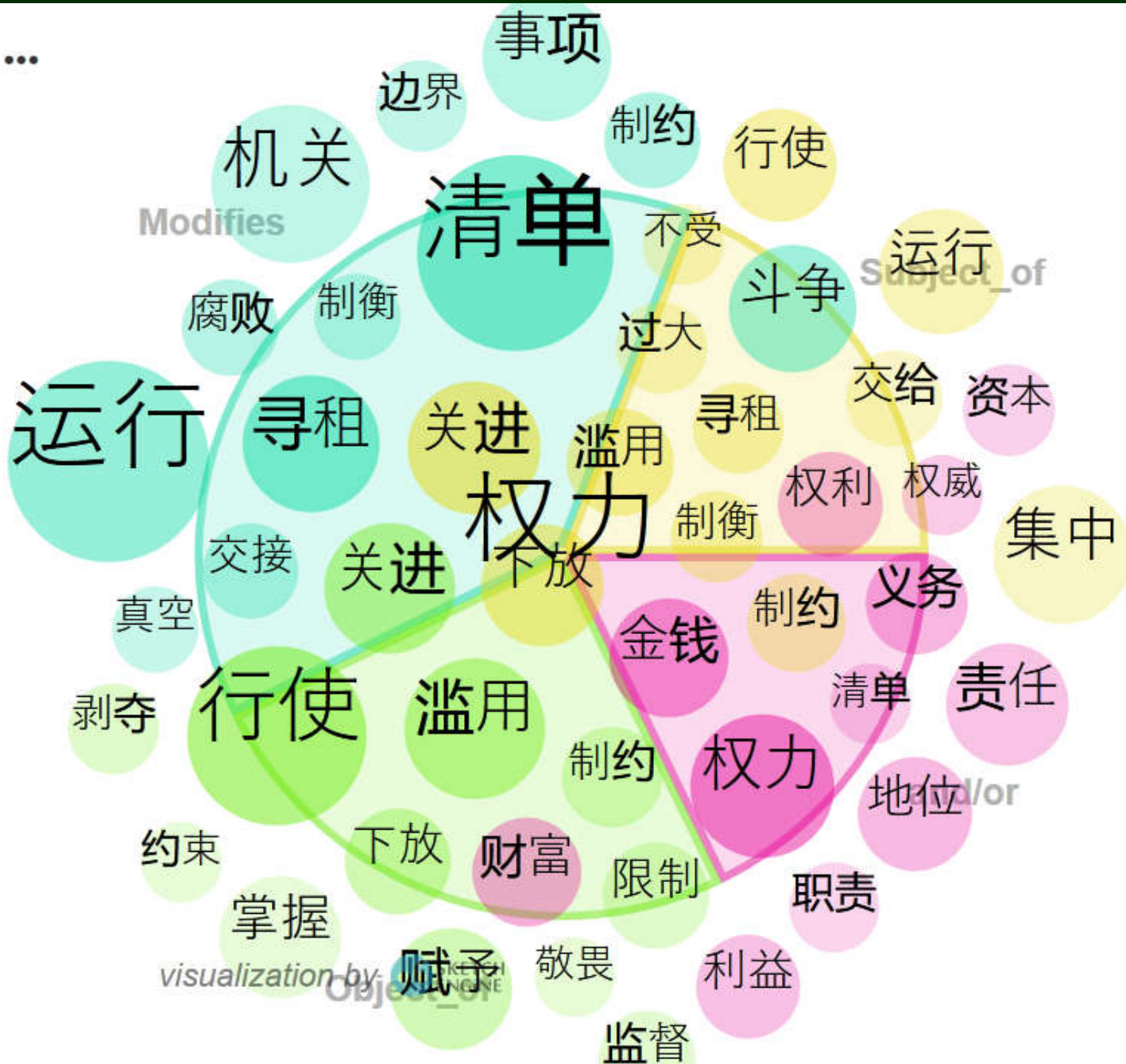
zhTenTen17

N_Modifier				Possession				Subject_of				Indirect-Object_of		
手中	2,764	8.71	...	游戏	9,720	10.21	...	关进	5,890	10.02	...	行使	873	9.29
利用 手中 权力				权力 的 游戏				把 权力 关进 制度 的 笼子				行使 权力		
行政	31,535	8.61	...	滥用	1,127	8.86	...	下放	4,488	9.39	...	滥用	631	8.87
行政 权力				权力 的 滥用				权力 下放				滥用 权力		
对公	845	7.28	...	制约	1,593	8.84	...	滥用	2,821	8.71	...	下放	164	7.29
对公 权力 的				权力 的 制约 和 监督				权力 滥用				下放 权力		
政治	8,845	7.15	...	监督	1,700	8.19	...	行使	3,426	8.64	...	防止	1,069	6.85
政治 权力				对 权力 的 监督				权力 行使				防止 权力 滥用		
规范	2,368	6.93	...	象征	1,425	8.08	...	制衡	1,468	8.05	...	监督	200	6.66
规范 权力 运行				权力 的 象征				权力 制衡				监督 权力		
政府	8,372	6.6	...	运行	875	7.53	...	寻租	1,409	8.03	...	牢记	117	6.64
政府 权力				权力 的 运行				权力 寻租 的				牢记 权力		
国家	16,737	6.53	...	争	737	7.28	...	制约	2,025	7.97	...	审批	135	6.62
国家 权力 机关				的 权力 之 争				权力 制约				审批 权力 下放		
专制	530	6.53	...	边界	446	7.19	...	运行	4,905	7.85	...	赋予	209	6.6
专制 权力				权力 的 边界				权力 运行 的				赋予 权力		
约束	704	6.52	...	机关	483	7.09	...	集中	6,706	7.23	...	不受	96	6.6
约束 权力				人民 行使 国家 权力 的 机关 是				权力 集中				不受 监督 的 权力 必然		

Word sketch: POWER



Word sketch: 權力



Method

Sketch Engine (SkE) tools:

A. Global searches: Word sketch, thesaurus

B. Specific searches: Concordance

- CQL (Corpus Query Language) searches,
- Collocations: words occurring between [-3, +3]

e.g.,

CQL [word="power"] []{1,3}[lemma = "lie"][word="in"]

1,798 (0.08 per million)

CQL [word="权力"] [word="在于"]

54 less than 0.01 per million

Thesaurus: English

Word Frequency		Word Frequency	
1	energy 5,497,493	11	state 11,259,165
2	force 3,134,504	12	experience 8,359,286
3	control 4,741,951	13	life 17,232,230
4	system 13,371,452	14	business 16,058,542
5	action 5,376,721	15	position 4,299,292
6	change 6,820,551	16	form 5,997,434
7	work 13,918,242	17	activity 5,362,200
8	value 5,530,097	18	world 15,477,129
9	use 7,623,997	19	Service 14,673,797
10	level 8,591,865	20	process 7,757,084

Thesaurus: Chinese

Word	Frequency ?	Word	Frequency ?
1 权利	916,364 ...	26 组织	6,278,261 ...
2 利益	1,866,199 ...	27 管理	16,210,135 ...
3 制度	4,435,862 ...	28 国家	11,585,972 ...
4 责任	4,146,722 ...	29 资本	1,967,984 ...
5 法律	3,480,057 ...	30 职责	1,191,285 ...
6 行为	4,028,671 ...	31 意识	2,199,948 ...
7 地位	1,423,396 ...	32 问题	17,087,974 ...
8 关系	5,278,272 ...	33 体系	3,521,064 ...
9 政治	2,577,696 ...	34 观念	864,747 ...
10 政府	7,849,690 ...	35 部门	7,272,756 ...

Examples

CQL [word="权力"] [word="在于"] 54 less than 0.01 per million
权力在于:

a) source/coming from, b) influence on / control of

Official duty, administrative responsibility, Leadership; and
manipulation of the execution of duty:

因为政府官员的权力在于批或者不批

税务的权力在于，差旅费“标准”在涉税时，如果不合理，税务有调整的权力。这个是《征管法》35条赋予的实实在在的权力。

中国的核心权力在于党组织，不存在世袭制，全体百姓都有资格参与

Subsequent studies

Use sub-corpora

Refine analytical tools

Domain specific investigations:

e.g., job interviews

Power in specific genres/situations: job interview

Civil service

Frame

- exam

Register

- Civil servant speaking

- field
- tenor
- mode

- “3-views”
- Plain narrative
- One-way, monologue

Power

- Originality
- Relations

Stance of the gov't

- Low, conformity
- Gov't-first



enterprise

- Pitch business plan

- Negotiation and debate

- Innovation, custom-view
- Small talk, confrontational
- Impromptu

Personal stance

- High, individual & critical
- Equalitarian



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The background is a dark blue gradient with faint, light blue geometric patterns. On the right side, there is a large, semi-circular scale with markings from 0 to 200. Several concentric circles and dashed lines are also visible, some with arrows indicating a direction or path.

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Q & A

問 答

Abstract: The notion of power is at the heart of socially-oriented language studies, i.e., (critical) discourse analysis, politeness research, and workplace communication. This study examines the keyword power in English and 權力 *quanli* in Chinese in terms of their core and connotative meanings. We draw on large scale corpora (e.g., enTenTen15, zhTenTen17 accessible in Sketch Engine) to investigate the use of the keywords in a number of *comparable contexts* and to look at their major *collocates*. We draw on conceptual ontology frameworks (SUMO, Wordnet) to map the keywords in conceptual networks and contrast their similarities and differences. The study attempts to attest the hypothesis that 權力 *quanli* (or its synonym 力量 *liliang*) in Chinese closely related to the relevant *social networks* in which the participants play a role, and power in English is largely derived from *individual's right*, ability and creativity.