The Emotional Expression and Perceptual Presentation in Li Qingzhao's Ci Poetry from the Perspective of Perceptual Quantification

Chen Lin[1,a,*]

[1]*School of Liberal Arts, Guangxi University, Nanning City, 530004, China*
a. 2221110242@st.gxu.edu.cn
*corresponding author

Abstract: As a female Ci poet, Li Qingzhao possesses a unique aesthetic perspective and keen perceptual sensitivity. The perceptual quantification that runs throughout her Ci poetry allows her to overcome the barriers of language, accurately conveying abstract perceptions, and effectively preventing emotions and perceptions from being distorted in the process of transmission. However, most of the existing research has primarily focused on her methods of emotional expression and artistic techniques, with limited exploration of the concept of perceptual quantification. Thus, the paper aims to explore how Li Qingzhao uses linguistic techniques such as quantifiers, degree words, reduplication words, and reference objects to quantify perception, thereby precisely transmitting abstract emotions and perceptions. By analyzing representative works such as *Spring in Peach Blossom Land* (*Wuling Chun*), *Slow, Slow Song (Sheng Sheng Man), Silk-Washing Stream (Huan Xi Sha)*, and *Song of Wafting Fragrance (Xing Xiang Zi),* the paper reveals how Li Qingzhao skillfully uses quantifiers and degree words to transform intangible emotions and perceptions into something tangible. The synesthetic effect of reduplication words amplifies the emotional impact, while the use of referential imagery gives abstract emotions a concrete "measure," thus breaking through the constraints of language and preventing emotions from being diluted or misunderstood.

Keywords: Li Qingzhao, Perceptual Quantification, Language Skill, Emotional Expression

1.   Introduction

Li Qingzhao, also known by her courtesy name Yi'an Jushi, is one of the most celebrated female poets of the Song Dynasty. And her works are highly regarded for their emotional depth, profound imagery, and refined language. In the Ci works of Song Dynasty literati, Li Qingzhao's Ci was regarded as "in a class of its own." With her unique female perspective and sharp sensitivity, she pioneered a style focused on personal emotions, developing a distinctive technique and establishing the one-of-a-kind "Yi'an style." Her Ci poetry is not only rich in personal color but demonstrates a profound insight into life and emotions via exquisite linguistic techniques. One key characteristic of Li Qingzhao's works is the delicate and subtle expression of emotions. The emotional expressions in her poems often evoke a nuanced and genuine resonance. However, research on Li Qingzhao's works has mostly focused on the expression of emotions and artistic conception, with less attention given to how she effectively conveys perception via linguistic techniques, preventing ambiguity and distortion

in the transmission of emotions. In her works, the issue of perceptual quantification, which refers to the process of translating subjective, abstract perceptions into concrete, perceivable expressions through specific linguistic techniques, has not yet been fully analyzed or systematically elaborated. This strategy involves not only sensory perceptions (such as vision, hearing, and touch) but also the expression of emotions. Her technique of perceptual quantification uses methods such as quantifiers, degree words, and reduplication words to transform abstract emotions into concrete expressions, thereby minimizing ambiguity and misunderstanding during communication. Thus the paper aims to explore how Li Qingzhao employs perceptual quantification to precisely convey her emotions and perceptions. In particular, it analyzes how she uses linguistic techniques in her works to convert abstract emotions and perceptions into something tangible, perceptible expressions, while examining the role and impact of this technique in her works. In addition, the paper explores how Li Qingzhao's perceptual quantification has influenced later creators, and how this technique enhances the accuracy and depth of emotional transmission. Through a comparative analysis of her work and that of other poets, it highlights her unique style and contributes to a deeper understanding of her linguistic techniques and ancient Chinese literature.

2. From "Limitlessness" to "Quantifiability": The Use of Quantifiers and Degree Words

In Li Qingzhao's Ci poetry, the use of quantifiers and degree words serves as the most direct means of perceptual quantification. Her personal subjective emotions are immeasurable, devoid of specific form, size, or quality, but quantifiers and degree words impart numerical precision to immeasurable emotional perceptions, thereby transforming them from immeasurable to measurable.

2.1. The Use of Quantifiers in Expression

The use of quantifiers in Li Qingzhao's works plays a crucial role in quantifying abstract emotions. Quantifiers, inherently designed to express specific quantities, enable the poet to imbue emotions with greater precision and depth. As one of the most characteristic Chinese word classes, quantifiers are also known as measure words, which denotes the unit of quantity of a person, thing or action. In addition to their function in quantification, quantifiers also have important rhetorical functions. The vivid imagery associated with classifiers is one of the key manifestations of their rhetorical role. Quantifiers mostly evolved from ancient nouns or verbs, which were classified as nouns in earlier stages [1]. This indicates that classifiers inherently possess characteristics of nouns: nouns are basic lexical units in language that represent people, things, places, concepts, or abstract ideas, and they are inherently vivid and concrete. As such, quantifiers also carry this vividness. Li Qingzhao had a remarkable grasp of the imagery they imply. In her poetry, what might appear as casual or incidental use of classifiers is, in fact, carefully considered and meticulously crafted [2]. And the imagery in quantifiers is effectively employed here, particularly with the word "缕" (lǚ), meaning a thread, in the line "I'm lonely in my room; Each heartstring is a thread of gloom (寂寞深闺,柔肠一寸愁千缕) [3]. Originally referring to silk or flax threads, it later came to denote fine, thread-like objects, evoking connotations of delicacy, length, and endless entanglement. Li Qingzhao uses this imagery to transform the intangible feeling of "sorrow" into a vivid, almost tangible presence, allowing the reader to sense its abundance, depth, intensity, and lingering nature. And numerals also serve a rhetorical role by creating vivid imagery. In her poetry, she cleverly combines various numerals and quantifiers to enhance the rhetorical effect, amplifying the quantified emotional impact.

The use of quantifiers is primarily realized in two ways in Li Qingzhao's Ci poetry: indirect and direct. In the indirect usage, quantifiers are often used to modify specific things, and by means of contrasts and metaphors, perceptions at the level of the body lead to perceptions at the level of the mind. For example, in *Slow, Slow Song (Sheng Sheng Man)*, the quantifiers in the line "Three cups, or

maybe just a little more, of wine so dry, oh, how could I endure at dusk the drift of wind so swift (三杯两盏淡酒,怎敌他、晚来风急?)" are not meant to indicate exact numbers, but to suggest a minimal amount of wine consumed [3]. In reality, the wine consumed need not be confined to three cups or more, nor is it necessarily light. Instead, it is the biting evening wind and the weight of sorrow that, even cup after cup, even if the wine were rich and full-bodied, cannot dispel the grief. The "light wine" tasted and the "swift wind at dusk" felt contrast with each other. The fierce wind at dusk metaphorically mirrors her restless, inescapable sorrow, capturing the depth of grief and the helplessness of not being able to shake it off. In *Song of Wafting Fragrance (Xing Xiang Zi)*, the line "How hard it is to pass the barriers paved by cloud and moonlight! (云阶月地,关锁千重)" is also an example of indirect expression [3]. The quantifiers modifying the barriers, along with the visual representation of countless locks, naturally evoke the feeling of endless sorrow, thus giving the blurred and generalized emotions of parting a visual depth. Besides, the direct use of quantifiers to modify emotions enhances their depth and breadth. In the final lines of *Slow, Slow Song (Sheng Sheng Man)*, "Oh, what can I do with a grief beyond belief (这次第,怎一个愁字了得)"and in *Silk-Washing Stream (Huan Xi Sha)*, "Her head inclined,her face reveals a hidden grace. 'To my regret,' she writes, 'you did not keep the date.' (一面风情深有韵,半笺娇恨寄幽怀)," as well as in *A Twig of Mume Blossoms (Yi Jian Mei)*, "As fallen flowers drift and water runs its way, one longing overflows, two places with same woes (花自飘零水自流,一种相思,两处闲愁)", all demonstrate this technique [3]. And the emotion of sorrow transcends the capacity of a single, profound word for sorrow, highlighting its intensity. Her love and resentment are only conveyed in half a letter, not a whole page, which not only portrays the dynamic scene of a young lady, deeply missing her lover while writing a letter to arrange a meeting, but also vividly presents the delicate, almost unspoken feelings of a young woman in her private chamber. The separation of two people across distant ends is tightly connected by a shared longing, which quantifies the closeness between them, as they miss and care for each other. The "two places" are made more emotionally significant via the physical distance and spatial separation, intensifying the weight of their sorrowful longing.

2.2. The Use of Degree Words in Expression

Compared to quantifiers, degree words are less precise in quantifying perception, but convey a more subtle level of emotion. They are mostly used to directly describe the concentration of emotion or the intensity of perception, especially through the details of the senses that reflect inner emotional fluctuations. For example, in *Song of Wafting Fragrance (Xing Xiang Zi)*, "Heaven as earth,alas! Is thick with parting grief (正人间天上浓愁)", the weight and depth of sorrow is expressed to the fullest extent through the word "thick" [3]. Similarly, in *Spring in Jade Pavilion (Yulou Chun)*, the flower branches do not have tactile sensations, but she keenly perceives the slight spring chill. Even a little bit of light cold is enough to cause the slender, delicate branches to wilt, symbolizing how fragile and fleeting beauty is, where the light cold on the senses only makes the sense of regret even stronger [3]. In addition, *Tipsy in the Shade of Flowers (Zui Hua Yin)* portrays the persistence and depth of sorrow. The coolness in the air is barely perceptible at first, yet it profoundly affects her sensitive nerves. It is already deep into the night, and the poet remains restless, unable to sleep. Even by midnight, she stays awake, feeling the chill seep through. This prolonged sorrow mirrors the gradual infiltration of coldness throughout the long night, with the sorrow expanding in tandem. Through this delicate depiction of coldness, Li Qingzhao vividly conveys her inner distress and loneliness, allowing the reader to feel the emotional weight and the inescapable sense of entrapment she experiences [3]. Also, the technique of using intoxication to convey melancholy is a typical example of how Li Qingzhao employs sensory perception to quantify emotions. Through detailed descriptions of bodily sensations, she skillfully externalizes her inner melancholic feelings, thereby

transforming the intangible sorrow into something concrete. This not only enhances the emotional impact but deepens the subtlety of her expression. In *Telling of Innermost Feeling (Su Zhongqing)*, Li Qingzhao portrays how deep sorrow drives her to numb herself with alcohol. The loss of the homeland and being far from home evoke complex psychological pain, resonating with the disarray and suffering caused by intoxication and a hangover [3]. Through sensory perception, she brings her inner sorrow to life, turning the intangible emotion into something tangible and forging a subtle connection between the mind and the body.

3. From "Sound" to "Emotion": The Role of Synesthetic Effects in Emotional Expression

3.1. The Musicality of Reduplication Words and the Synesthetic Effects

The use of reduplication as a unique rhetorical device not only creates a rhythmic beauty through repetitive sounds but connects different sensory experiences via synesthetic effects, deepening and enriching emotional expression. Zhang Duanyi mentioned in *A Compilation of Precious Anecdotes* that the successive reduplication words in *Slow, Slow Song (Sheng Sheng Man)* enhance musicality and rhythm through their skillful repetition and layering, showcasing a distinctive linguistic artistry. He believed that the use of fourteen reduplicated words was unprecedented and compared its effect to the fluidity and precision of a masterful sword dance [4]. This analogy emphasizes the seamless flow and expert craftsmanship of the repetition, evoking grace and precision, much like a finely executed performance. Similarly, in the *A Collection of Talks on Ci Poetry*, Xu Qiu highlighted the uniqueness of these reduplication words, comparing them to rolling beads, seamlessly connected and exuding a supreme musical beauty [5]. Many scholars believe that the successive reduplication words in Li Qingzhao's Ci poetry primarily exhibits the following three expressive features: first, their phonetic recurrence facilitates smooth and effortless reading; second, they impart a sense of urgency, liveliness, and a resonant musical beauty to the verses; additionally, they can reinforce imagery or concepts, intensifying tone and expressiveness while adding weight to the content [6].

However, previous scholars have not delved into the phonetic principles to thoroughly explore why these reduplicated words can exhibit a sense of urgent and resonant musicality, nor how they align with the sorrowful emotions conveyed by the poet, thereby materializing abstract feelings. In this context, Li Qingzhao's use of reduplication words acts as a means of perceptual quantification. Through the artful repetition of sounds, she intensifies the emotional expression, thus adding greater depth to the feeling conveyed. The synthetic effect refers to the ability of one sensory stimulus to trigger an experience in another sense. Research indicates that in many languages, front vowels tend to be associated with small, light objects, while back vowels are more commonly linked to large, heavy ones. In *Slow, Slow Song (Sheng Sheng Man),* the first reduplicated word "xunxun mimi" (寻寻觅觅), meaning seeking tirelessly, contains the vowel [i] in "mi" (觅), which is a front, high, unrounded vowel, producing a delicate, soft sound. In the following "lengleng qingqing" (冷冷清清), which means a sense of coldness and emptiness, the vowel [ə] in "leng" is a central, mid, unrounded vowel, while the vowel [i] in "qing" is a front, high, unrounded vowel, creating a sense of slenderness and coldness. At the same time, both words end with the nasal consonant [ŋ] and begin with the voiced lateral [l], which causes vocal cord vibration and gives the sound a muffled, heavy quality. Overall, the syllabic combination produces a dual auditory effect of fragility and resilience, perfectly reflecting the poem's desolate, cold atmosphere.

3.2. The Repetition of Reduplication Words and Emotional Quantification

The repeated use of reduplication words not only strengthens the phonetic effect of the language but, through the continuity and explosiveness of its pronunciation, quantifies the intensity and depth of

emotions on a perceptual level, making the expression of emotions more precise and powerful. In *Slow, Slow Song (Sheng Sheng Man)*, the reduplication word of "凄凄惨惨戚戚(I feel so sad, so drear, so lonely, without cheer)" demonstrates both the urgency in sound and the intensification of emotion. In this work, the initial consonants of "凄凄" and "戚戚" are the voiceless aspirated palatal affricates [tɕʰ], while "惨惨" has the initial consonants as the voiceless aspirated alveolar affricates [tsʰ]. The airflow explosion produced during pronunciation creates a sense of urgency. The reduplication word "点点滴滴 (a fine rain drizzles)" with its initial consonants being plosives [t], enhances the rhythmic clink of the language through its explosive effect.

The affricate, in their pronunciation, first involve a burst followed by friction, creating a sound effect of closure and then release, producing a sense of urgency in the auditory experience. And the plosive characteristics of the consonants allow the airflow to break through obstruction, thereby generating an explosive sound. This phonetic mechanism brings strong continuity in rhythm, adding weight and intensity to emotional expression. Li Qingzhao deliberately employs reduplication, repeating single-syllable words to create a rhythmic, almost percussive effect in her poetry. This technique produces a cascade of sharp, resonant sounds that evoke a vivid auditory experience for the reader. The synesthetic effects come into play here multiple times, allowing the listener to feel the heightened intensity of emotion through the musicality of language. Simultaneously, the pauses between reduplicated words create a rhythmic repetition and emphasis, further accentuating the expression of emotion. This makes the sorrow and melancholy within the poem more vivid and tangible. The repetition and eruption of sounds represent her method of perceptual quantification achieved via prosody. Each recurrence of the reduplicated words not only amplifies the auditory impact but deepens the emotional resonance, giving abstract feelings a tangible, almost measurable quality. In the end, this musicality transcends mere words, immersing the reader in a richer, more profound emotional experience. In addition, the reduplication of quantifiers in Li Qingzhao's works deserves special attention, which can indicate the universality of individual elements within a whole and the continuity or accumulation of objects or actions. It not only conveys multiple meanings but also creates diverse imagery, enhancing the aesthetic appeal of language [2]. As mentioned before, quantifiers themselves possess vivid imagery, and their reduplication further enhances this quality, serving as a manifestation of perceptual quantification.

4.   Reflection of the "Heart" through "Things": The Use of Referential Imagery

The term referential imagery means an object chosen as a standard, which provides a benchmark for comparing and measuring other objects, phenomena or measurement results. In Li Qingzhao's Ci poetry, the use of referential imagery serves as an important way to quantify perception. By using specific, measurable things as a reference, abstract emotions are concretized and endowed with a quantitative concept, allowing readers to more intuitively perceive the depth of the emotions. Cao Yimei noted that in Chinese classical poetry, the presentation of the visual and auditory worlds developed the earliest and was the richest [7]. The writing of taste aesthetics is also noteworthy, while the depiction of smell is relatively weak. This may be because scent, as an aesthetic object, is more abstract and harder to explore. The scent captured by the sense of smell is the most elusive. If it is merely described by intensity or by being fragrant or foul, what is conveyed to the reader is only a vague outline of the concept. Therefore, in *Telling of Innermost Feeling (Su Zhongqing)*, Li Qingzhao does not directly describe the intensity of the fragrance but uses references to indirectly express the strength of the plum blossom scent, hence successfully quantifying the abstract idea of its fragrance Specifically, she first portrays the depth of the drunken dream and then uses it as a reference to illustrate how the plum blossom scent is powerful enough to shatter such a profound, intoxicating reverie, effectively emphasizing the intensity of the fragrance [3]. And this comparison makes the

intensity of the plum blossom fragrance more tangible, almost allowing one to feel the scent enveloping them. Similarly, in *Buddhist Dancers (Pusa Man)*, Li Qingzhao quantifies the intensity of sorrow via the contrast between the scent of incense and the lingering smell of alcohol [3]. The incense, typically lit before sleep, burns for a long time, with its fragrance growing stronger. However, by the time she wakes from her drunken stupor, the scent of incense has faded, while the heavy smell of alcohol lingers, hence revealing the depth and duration of her intoxication. And this prolonged intoxication mirrors the weight of her sorrow [8]. Through the comparison of the intensities of the incense and alcohol scents, Li Qingzhao skillfully transforms her formless sorrow into a tangible, perceptible entity, effectively quantifying the depth of her melancholy. Moreover, in *Spring in Peach Blossom Land (Wuling Chun)*, the famous line "But I'm afraid the grief-o'erladen boat upon Twin Creek can't keep afloat" also employs a reference object, the "grief-o'erladen boat" [3]. The small boat, light and grasshopper-like, has limited capacity. And this contrast highlights the heaviness of her sorrow, making one fear the boat may not bear it. Her intangible grief thus gains weight, becoming a tangible, measurable burden.

5.   Conclusion

Li Qingzhao skillfully uses quantifiers, degree words, reduplication words and referential imagery in her Ci poetry to achieve the artistic effect of perceptual quantification. Through these means, she is able to visualize abstract and vague emotions and perceptions, precisely conveying her inner feelings, making the depth and intensity of emotions more concrete, and avoiding ambiguities or misunderstandings. Quantifiers and degree words define and scale perceptions, while reduplication words enhance emotional expression through synesthetic effects. Additionally, reference imagery emphasizes the intensity and depth of emotions by creating vivid contrasts. Overall, she breaks through the traditional abstract expression of emotion through perceptual quantification, making the emotion in her works both delicate and full of tension. However, this study is limited by its focus on close reading and does not include large-scale data analysis, which restricts the generalizability and objectivity of the findings. In addition, it mainly focuses on the expression of senses such as smell and vision, lacking an analysis of other senses. Future research could validate the universality of the perception quantification phenomenon via large-scale data analysis, and delve into reduplication phenomena by integrating traditional phonology theories. Moreover, expanding the study to touch and taste will further explore perception quantification, broadening future research and offering richer perspectives for a multidimensional interpretation of Li Qingzhao's works.

References

[1]   Lai, X.G. (2009) Quantitative semantic features and grammatical functions of quantifiers. *Journal of Southwest University of Science and Technology(Philosophy and Social Science Edition) 26(02): 13-18+49.*

[2]   Bi, Q.Y. (2011) A study on the quantitative rhetoric of Li Qingzhao' words. 2011. Yangzhou University.

[3]   Li Q.Z. and Xu, P.J. (2018) The Annotated Works of Li Qingzhao.Shanghai: Shanghai Classics Publishing House.

[4]   Zhang, D.Y. (1985) A Compilation of Precious Anecdotes. Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company.

[5]   Xu, Q. (1981) A Collection of Talks on Ci Poetry. Shanghai: Shanghai Classics Publishing House.

[6]   Huang, Y.Z. (1993) An Exploration of the Art of Overlapping Words in Li Qingzhao's Slow, Slow Song (Sheng Sheng Man). *Contemporary Rhetoric 03 (1993): 26-27. doi:10.16027/j.cnki.cn31-2043/h.1993.03.009.*

[7]   Cao, Y. (2020). Scent and Perception: The Olfactory World in Huang Tingjian's Poetry. *Literary and Art Studies,* 08: 71-80.

[8]   Yu, P.B. (2005) Selected Explanations.Selected Annotations on Tang and Song Poetry. Beijing: People's Literature Publishing House, 140.