

Analysis of sentence structure differences in English Chinese Translation

Haoping Meng^{1, a}

¹ Nanjing Normal University Ginling College, Nanjing 210097, China;

^aamhaoping@163.com

Abstract. To learn English Chinese translation well, we must understand the characteristics of English and Chinese. Because English and Chinese belong to different language families, the most effective way to understand their characteristics is to compare the syntactic structures of the two languages. The main differences between the two are that English is a morphological language, the connections within sentences or between sentences adopt syntactic or lexical means, the syntactic structure is rigorous, and the form expresses meaning. While Chinese is a semantic language, it is mostly parataxis, with loose syntactic structure and lexical meaning. English Hypotaxis is mainly used in sentences, parataxis is used in texts, while Chinese parataxis is mainly used in sentences, and hypotaxis appears in texts. Only by understanding and mastering these differences, it can help to avoid the problems that may be encountered in English-Chinese sentence translation, and of course, it can also improve the accuracy of sentence translation between English and Chinese

Keywords: English Chinese translation; Sentence structure; Difference analysis

1. Introduction

There are great differences in syntactic structure and expression between English and Chinese. Let's summarize these differences as follows.

The characteristics of English sentences: every component in the sentence has modifiers, and there can be more than one modifier, and each modifier can be very long. One modifier can also be modified by another modifier. Therefore, the sentence structure is complex, like a "towering tree", with branches and leaves, which is called "tree structure".

In Chinese, modifiers are few and short, and sentences are composed of clauses one by one, which are gradually unfolded, just like "vast expanses of blue waves, advancing layer by layer", which is known as "wavy structure". Grammarians call it "flowing sentence". This is the most fundamental difference between English and Chinese sentence structures. The key to the success of English Chinese translation is to change sentence patterns.

When translating from English to Chinese, change the "tree structure" of English sentences into the "wave structure" of Chinese sentences. vice versa. In English-Chinese translation, we should transform the modified structure in English, that is, the "subordinate structure" into "subject predicate structure". On the contrary, when translating Chinese into English, we should convert the Chinese clause, which is actually the "subject predicate structure" into the "subordinate structure" in English sentences.

2. Comparison of basic sentence patterns between English and Chinese

2.1 Basic sentence patterns of Chinese

The basic sentence patterns of Chinese are often more complex than those of English, because Chinese predicates are diverse, including verb predicates, adjective predicates, noun predicates and subject predicate predicates.

(1) Verb predicate sentence:

This kind of sentence is similar to English and can become a sentence pattern corresponding to the basic sentence pattern of English, such as:

- a) "subject predicate" sentence pattern, for example: 让大家走了。
- b) "Subject predicate complement" sentence pattern, for example: 爱情是美好的。
- c) "Subject predicate object" sentence pattern, for example: 暴风雨毁了很多房屋。
- d) "Subject predicate object" sentence pattern, for example: 她给他三本杂志。
- e) "Subject predicate object complement" sentence pattern, for example: 敌人逼她招供。
- f) "Subject predicate object" sentence pattern, for example: 那人爱财如命。
- g) "Subject predicate" sentence pattern, for example: 这孩子长得又高又大。

Although Chinese has these verb sentence patterns corresponding to the basic English sentence patterns, they are not completely corresponding, such as: "the barber cut your hair very short." The Chinese translation is very short, instead of simply saying, “理发师剪短了你的头发。”In addition, there is a sentence pattern of "subject + continuous verb" in Chinese. For example: 你去排队买票看电影消磨时间,我们吃完饭散步。There is generally no such sentence pattern in English.

(2) Nominal predicate:

Sometimes close to the English "subject predicate complement" sentence pattern, sometimes close to the "subject predicate object" sentence pattern or other sentence patterns. For example, 今天星期三。一张桌子四条腿。

(3) Adjective predicate sentence:

It is also equivalent to the "subject predicate complement" sentence pattern in English. For example, 南方的天气好。

(4) Subject predicate predicate sentence:

This sentence pattern is difficult to find a fixed sentence pattern in English. We can only choose different sentence patterns according to the situation.

- a) Large subject + (small subject + verb predicate) subject predicate sentence. For example, 他个子长得很快,智力发育也很快。
- b) Large subject + (small subject + noun predicate) subject predicate predicate sentence. For example, 西瓜一公斤4块钱。
- c) Large subject + (small subject + adjective predicate) subject predicate predicate sentence. For example, 中国地大物博。

2.2 basic sentence patterns of English

The predicate of an English sentence is a verb predicate, which is composed of a verb or a verb plus a complement. In English, there are seven basic sentence patterns:

- (1) SV sentence pattern: that is, intransitive verbs are used as predicates alone. For example: the bell rang.
- (2) SVC sentence pattern: that is, the connective verb is used as the predicate and the subject complement is used as the complement. For example: she became a teacher.
- (3) SVO sentence pattern: simple transitive verb as predicate, followed by simple object. For example, the farm hands had him.
- (4) SVOO sentence pattern: that is, the double transitive verb is used as the predicate, followed by two objects (indirect object and direct object) as the complement. For example: please hand me the book.

- (5) SVOC sentence pattern: that is, the object complement complex transitive verb is used as the predicate, followed by object + object complement as the complement. For example: they named their daughter Alice.
- (6) SVOA sentence pattern: verb complement complex transitive verb as predicate, followed by object and verb complement as complement. For example: fat has treated him pretty rough.
- (7) SVA sentence pattern: that is, the incomplete intransitive verb is used as the predicate, followed by the verb complement as the complement. For example, the building stock for many years.

3. Construction rules and expansion models of English and Chinese sentences

3.1 Construction rules of English and Chinese sentences

English sentence construction basically follows two principles: subject control and individual priority. The principle of subject domination means that the construction of English sentences is restricted by the subject. Compared with Chinese, English has the characteristics of subject. Not only is the predicate verb in an English sentence limited by the subject's person and number, but also the order of each component in an English sentence depends on the density of its relationship with the subject.

The principle of individual priority complements or explains the principle of subject domination from the semantic aspect. It refers to the tendency of sentence construction from small to large, from special to general, from individual to whole. The more special things are, the closer the relationship with the subject is, so they enjoy priority. The principle of individual priority mainly involves the following situations:

(1) Adverbial

- a) Predicate adjuncts precede sentence adjuncts because the former is more specific than the latter.
- b) The smaller place adverbial precedes the larger place adverbial.
- c) Smaller time units precede larger time units.

(2) Multinomial paratactic modifier

The arrangement has priority to be close to the word it modifies and subordinate to the head word of the noun. For example: Both the first two nice big old round red carved French wooden card TABLES in the room that were bought yesterday belongs to my father.

(3) Social attribute modifier

Modifiers such as social titles indicate a person's social attributes, from small to large.

Chinese sentence construction follows two rules: temporal control and overall priority. Temporal control refers to the construction of sentences mainly based on the natural process of events, including the description of events, causality, and conditions. For example, 亚父受玉斗,置地之,拔剑撞而破之。

Due to the rule of natural time sequence, unlike English, Chinese has not strict rules and order in sentence structure, but constructs sentence patterns according to needs. In other words, Chinese sentences are built on the main axis of ideas, emphasizing meaning and not emphasizing the structure of sentences. Many sentences may not have a subject, and some sentences have no obvious subject but definite meaning. In contrast, English sentences are constructed on the main axis of form, so there are many rules in English, and most of them need subject and predicate. The law of overall priority is a necessary supplement to the law of temporal control. It refers to the order from small to large, from whole to part, from abstract to concrete, and from important to unimportant.

3.2 English Chinese sentence expansion model

The opening of the beginning of a sentence in Chinese is due to the weak function of Chinese subject, which can form a sentence without subject, and does not need the consistency of subject and predicate in number, tense and voice. Therefore, there is considerable freedom to extend from the beginning of the sentence. Because Chinese has a closed sentence end, Chinese sentences are generally short.

The reason why the English sentence is closed is that the English sentence is constructed on the subject predicate axis, the subject function is very strong, and the predicate is consistent with the subject, which limits the extension of the sentence from the beginning. English sentence endings are open because English modifiers can be postpositive, the cohesive function of connectives is very strong, and effective hypotaxis can arrange a series of modifiers according to logical relations. Because English has an open ending, English sentences are often longer than Chinese.

4. Differences in sentence structures between English and Chinese

(1) English is passive; Chinese is active

For example, Air resistance must be given careful consideration when the aircraft is to be manufactured. 要制造飞机,就必须仔细考虑空气阻力问题。

(2) English is complicated and Chinese is short

For example, Mr. Song is my English teacher who is fat, short, bold but still attractive. The main sentence of this sentence is "Mr. Song is my teacher", followed by an attributive clause. Translated into Chinese, if we say "宋先生是我的那个体态肥胖、身材矮小、头发掉光但仍魅力无限的英语老师"。It will be cumbersome. We should translate the subject sentence and attributive clause separately, that is: "他是我们的英语教师,体态肥胖,身材矮小,头发掉光,但仍魅力四射。"

(3) English values tense and aspect; Chinese belittles tense aspect

From the perspective of grammatical category, the tense and aspect of English verbs are extremely rich. Theoretically, English has sixteen tenses. The so-called "tense" is the weakness of Chinese. English can describe the process and situation of action more accurately and finely through fixed grammatical means. Sometimes this description can also be integrated into an emotional color of the author or speaker. Take the continuous tense as an example:

He is always thinking of how he could do more for the people. (praise) 他总是考虑如何为人民做更多的事。

My wife is always changing her clothes. (indicating boredom) 我夫人穿衣服老喜欢换东换西。

(4) English attaches importance to object and Chinese attaches importance to person

English has a very obvious tendency of object description, which is most obvious in its choice of subject. English often chooses words that cannot perform actions or inanimate things as subjects. Relatively speaking, Chinese is generally more used to personal expression, especially the subject, and the subject is the first choice of the subject that can perform actions or living objects. For example, Bitterness fed on the man who had made the world laugh. 这位饱尝辛酸者却让全世界的人发出笑声。

(5) English attaches importance to hypotaxis; Chinese attaches importance to parataxis

English emphasizes the close combination of form and Chinese emphasizes the close combination of meaning. Specifically, English sentences combine words and phrases through a complete set of systematic grammatical structures and connectives, emphasizing correct structure and logical smoothness. Connectives must be added when translating into English. For example, As

the sun rose, the fog disappeared. Original translation: 随着太阳的升起,雾就散了。

Re-translation: 太阳一升起,雾就散了。

In this example, the original translation retains the connectives of the original text, while the re-translation conforms to the expression habits of Chinese and omits the connectives. Compared with the two, the re-translation is more concise and authentic. In the process of translation, it is necessary for translators to remind themselves that Chinese attaches importance to parataxis and English attaches importance to hypotaxis. When translating from English to Chinese, you don't have to stick to the form of English sentences and omit those unnecessary connecting elements; In Chinese-English translation, we can make the opposite adjustment and add relevant connecting components where necessary.

5. Summary

It can be seen from the above that there are obvious differences in sentence structures between English and Chinese. In English learning, we must eliminate these interferences caused by cultural and thinking differences, timely find, correctly understand and properly deal with the differences in sentence structure, so as to ensure the improvement and development of English listening, speaking, reading, writing, cross-cultural communication and translation skills.

References

- [1] Wen Hua Teng. The Accurate Use of Chinese: Practical Sentence Structures and Word Usage for English Speakers[M]. Taylor and Francis: 2021-07-18.
- [2] Sun Zhenghui, Shi Yajiao, Guo Peng, Yang Yiming, Zhu Zude. Independent syntactic representation identified in left front-temporal cortex during Chinese sentence comprehension[J]. Brain and Language, 2021, 214.
- [3] Jing Wang. Evaluating and Comparing “Luo Tuo Xiang Zi” English to Chinese Translation on Application of House’s Translation Quality Assessment Model[J]. International Journal of Education and Management, 2020, 5(4).
- [4] Yi-chen Chen. An Investigation into EFL Learners’ Translations of Metaphors from Cognitive and Cultural Perspectives[J]. International Journal of Comparative Literature and Translation Studies, 2017, 5(3).