Comparison and Analysis of English and Chinese Syntactic Features

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Abstract: *English and Chinese belong to different language systems, and there are significant differences in sentence structure between the two: English sentences tend to be hypotaxis, while Chinese sentences tend to be parataxis; English is a static language, while Chinese is a dynamic language; the Passive voice is used in English, and the Active voice is used in Chinese. Such a huge difference creates obstacles for translators in the process of translating between English and Chinese, and solving this problem is necessary to correctly convert the source language into the target language. This article first analyzes the syntactic features of English and Chinese sentences, and then compares and analyzes the differences in syntactic features between English and Chinese from the perspective of translation.*

Keywords: *Comparison between English and Chinese; sentence structure; syntax features*

1. Introduction

English is an Indo-European languages, and Chinese is a Sino-Tibetan languages. The two belong to different language mechanisms, and there are obvious differences in morphology, syntax and text structure. English is good at using long sentences, with complex sentence structures and strong correlation between various parts of the sentence. Moreover, there are many joint components, and the resulting sentence structure is relatively complex, which makes English sentences longer. A major feature of English is the postposition of modifiers, which means that the structure of sentences can be infinitely extended. On the contrary, in Chinese, there are mostly flowing sentences, loose sentences, and condensed sentences. The above differences determine the huge differences between the two languages, and in order to achieve the goal of being faithful to the original text in English Chinese translation practice, it is necessary to explore the differences and make adjustments and corrections according to the grammar guidelines of the target language. Chomsky pointed out that emphasizing and searching for universal laws of language makes comparative research between languages, whether it is a general comparison or a contrastive study emphasizing differences, of great significance [1]. This highlights the importance of grasping the syntactic differences between two languages. Only by achieving this can we make corresponding adjustments when facing complex sentence structures in English, so that the final translation truly conforms to the expression habits of Chinese.

2. The syntactic features of English and Chinese sentences

2.1. The syntactic features of English sentences

According to the categories and characteristics of predicate verbs, the subject predicate structure in English can be classified into five basic sentence patterns, namely "Subject+Verb (SV); Subject+Verb+Predicate (SVP); Subject+Verb+Object (SVO): Subject+Verb+Indirect object+Direct object (SvoO); Subject+Verb+Object+Object complement (SVOC) [2] " . According to the complexity of sentences, English sentences can be divided into simple, complex, and compound sentences. Among them, simple sentence refers to the situation that there is only one predicate verb in the sentence, and the basic structure of the subject sentence is subject predicate structure, mainly refers to imperative sentence, exclamatory sentence, interrogative sentence, declarative sentence. A coordinate sentence refers to a situation where two or more simple sentences are connected by coordinate conjunctions. Its basic structure is connected by coordinate conjunctions such as "and", "but", "or" and "so", or by punctuation points such as commas and semicolons. The meaning between each sentence is equally important, usually including a parallel relationship, an adversative relation, a selected relationship, or a causal relationship. Compound sentences refer to situations where a main sentence and one or more clauses are combined

together. Among them, there is a certain subordinate relationship between the clause and the main sentence, and the clause needs to serve as a certain component of the sentence, such as the subject, object, predicate, etc. The main sentence can independently express the complete meaning, while the subordinate sentence cannot exist independently.

2.2. The syntactic features of Chinese sentences

According to the expressive function and form, Chinese sentence patterns can be divided into seven categories: ①Topic sentence, "topic+explanation": He has no experience driving. ②Subject-predicate sentences: He is learning how to drive, and he has two small cars, which are very new. This car is a Ford brand. ③Relational Statement: If handled properly, the problem is not difficult to solve. ④ Compact sentence: Either one goes forward or he will be left behind. ⑤ Existential sentence: There is still a lot of work to be done. ⑥Exclamation sentence: Look at how energetic he Is! ⑦Imperative sentence: Do not drive under the influence of alcohol[2]. Obviously, there are subject predicate sentences, non-subject predicate sentences, and compound sentences in Chinese, but unlike English, there are many types of predicates in Chinese, which can be served by multiple components, including verbs, nouns, or adjectives. Therefore, in the translation process, long and difficult sentences in English can be divided and reorganized based on the characteristics of Chinese, striving to reproduce the content of the original English text In Chinese sentence structure: and there are also many sentences without subjects in Chinese. The Chinese sentence structure is loose, and the topic is relatively loose. Sentence forms are diverse and relatively flexible, without a rigorous subject predicate structure, but they also focus on topics and comments.

3. Hypotaxis and parataxis

American linguist Nida once pointed out that the most important distinguishing feature between Eastern and Western languages is the difference in hypotaxis and parataxis. [3]. The so-called "hypotaxis" refers to the language organization method in which English uses formal means to express sentence meaning and logical relationship symbol forms from "scattered" to "set" through morphological changes, vocabulary, and cohesion based on words. The so-called 'Parataxis' refers to a language organization that connects words or clauses through semantic correlation and internal logic, emphasizing the connection between internal logic and meaning[4].Therefore, unlike the rigorous structure of the English language, Chinese sentences are mostly flowing sentences, loose sentences and compact sentences. When translating from English to Chinese, we should get rid of the constraints of hypotaxis in English syntactic structure, follow the rules of Chinese grammar, and appropriately choose expressions that are more consistent with Chinese sentence patterns. For example:

Example 1: The second question is that self-organisation will not get us where we want to go.

The relative words "that" and "where" in this sentence lead to the predicative clause and the attributive clause respectively, and lead to the Adverbial clause of time. English emphasizes hypotaxis, which makes sentences compact and in line with English's hypotaxis characteristics. The parataxis in Chinese is usually manifested as a combination of several short sentences, in the form of a deity. Therefore, in order to make the translation appear more authentic, it is necessary to timely use the parataxis form in the process of translating from English to Chinese.

Example 2: The food supply will not increase nearly enough to match this, which means that we are heading into a crisis in the matter of producing and marketing food.

This sentence is also a composite sentence composed of multiple clauses, with a tight structure and complex sentence structure. Among them, the non-predicate clause guided by which also includes an object clause guided by that. In the process of translating from English to Chinese, if the process of translation is entirely based on English sentence structures, the resulting Chinese sentences will inevitably have a chaotic structure and meaning that does not match the original text. The sentence structure should be broken down based on the emphasis on hypotaxis in English and the emphasis on semantic harmony in Chinese, and ultimately presented in the form of several short sentences.

Example 3: One difficulty is that almost all of what is called behavioral science continues to trace behavior to states of mind, feelings, traits of character, human nature, and so on.

This sentence is a complex sentence that is connected by two connecting words, "that" and "what". However, after being translated into Chinese, the corresponding Chinese sentence does not rely on

connecting words for connection, but rather on the meaning correlation between various clauses and between clauses and main clauses for sorting. At this point, dealing with conjunctions has become a key and difficult point in the translation process. In this sentence, in the process of translation, it is necessary to first find the basic structure of the main sentence, and then analyze the relationship between clauses and clauses, as well as the relationship between clauses and main sentences. Only in this way can the connotation of the original text be preserved while transforming the sentence structure.

4. Static and dynamic language

English is a static language, while Chinese is a dynamic language. The reason why English is a static language is because nouns and prepositions are frequently used and have an advantage in English. There can only be one predicate verb in English sentences, and other words expressing actions can only be nominal verbs. Therefore, nominalization has become a common phenomenon in English use, that is, nouns are superior to verbs [5]. In Chinese, verbs dominate, and multiple verbs can be combined as predicates without the need for conjunctions, highlighting the dynamic characteristics of Chinese. And verbs can serve as any component of a sentence without changing their form.

This characteristic is fully reflected in some signs. For example:

Example 4: No Parking

Example 5: No Admittance Except on Business

Example 6: Authorized Cars only

Among them, prepositions have extremely high flexibility, so the use of prepositions should be emphasized in the process of translating from Chinese to English. For example:

Example 7: He went to Hawaii on plane last summer.

The most prominent manifestation of the static characteristics of English is the application of prepositions. Although prepositions in English are function words, their meanings are very rich, they are frequently used, their usage is flexible, and their ideographic function is strong. The predicate of this sentence is "went" to indicate that he is going to Hawaii, while the preposition "on" in this sentence does not directly use its original meaning of "above", but rather translates it as "travel on". Because the use of prepositions in English often leads to the selection of verbs for matching in the Chinese expressions, rather than using the original preposition form. That is to say, English prepositions inherently contain action or dynamic meanings, serving as dynamic verbs with different functions in different contexts. In this sentence, the preposition "on" no longer represents its original meaning, but rather means "travel on". This greatly reflects the static characteristics of English, and in the process of translation, attention should be paid to the application of prepositions and the judgment of their components in sentences. Then analyze and translate it based on the differences in sentence structures between English and Chinese.

In addition, static expression in English is often expressed through the combination of "prepositions+abstract nouns". Abstract nouns in English are often derived from verbs to express actions, behaviors, changes, states, qualities, and other meanings. This expression is more prominent in academic and technological genres. For example:

Example 8: "And of your infliction." Cried Elizabeth with energy.

The original meaning of "conflict" in the original text is "punishment, criminal penalty". In English to Chinese translation, if the translator translates it directly according to the sentence structure characteristics of English, it will make readers confused about its meaning and cannot understand the language purpose and emotions of the characters. In this case, it needs to be concretized and translated as "you caused it". This transformation not only makes the translation conform to Chinese writing habits, but also highlights the character's personality and fully expresses the character's emotions, accurately reproduce the meaning of the original text, making the dialogue more rational and vivid.

Example 9: His refusal to pay the fine got him even more trouble.

If the original text is translated literally as follow, "His refusal to pay the fine has made him even more in trouble", although the meaning of this sentence can be understood after careful reading, the logic of the sentence is chaotic and unclear, which can easily lead to ambiguity. At this time, according to the characteristics of English as a static language and Chinese as a Dynamic programming language, the translation strategy of separating them into sentences should be adopted to ensure the narrative pace is

unflagging and the expression is clear, so that it is easier for the target language readers to accept and understand in the text reading.

Example 10: Your foot will feel better after the application of this ointment.

English is a static language, usually using nouns and prepositions in sentences; Chinese is a dynamic language, and is good at using verbs. In this sentence, if the literal translation is used during the conversion between English and Chinese, it is translated as "the application of ointment makes your feet more comfortable". Although the general meaning is outlined, this obviously does not conform to the expression habits of Chinese. Therefore, in English to Chinese translation, due to the differences between English and Chinese sentence structures, abstract nouns in English should be converted into verbs in Chinese according to the specific context, so that the translated sentence is more fluent and easy to understand, at the same time, it is more in line with Chinese writing habits and thinking habits.

5. Passive voice and active voice

Both English and Chinese have active voice and passive voice. However, compared with English, Chinese is more inclined to active voice in the process of language expression. This difference in usage is also one of the important differences between English and Chinese[6]. This feature is particularly prominent in English technology writing and has almost become an expression habit, because passive sentence structures do not need to specify the agent, which can reduce subjective color, highlight the object of explanation, and make the expression more objective. In English-Chinese translation, it is important to grasp this difference and make it easier for the target language readers to accept. For example:

Example 11: Fresh progress has been made in adjusting the industrial structure, and the infrastructure has been extensively upgraded.

In this sentence, structural adjustment itself cannot make new progress. If it is literally translated as "The industrial structure adjusting has made fresh progress", it obviously does not conform to the language logic of English. Similarly, the infrastructure itself will not be strengthened. The original meaning of "we" has made progress in these aspects, so the active voice of Chinese should be transformed into the passive voice of English in the process of translation, this is more in line with English language habits, otherwise readers of the translated text will not be able to understand the correct meaning of the original text.

Example 12: During this transfer, traditional historical methods were augmented by additional methodologies designed to interpret the new forms of evidence in the historical study.

The form of "be+done" is used in this sentence to indicate passive meaning. In the process of English Chinese language conversion, if it is expressed in Chinese as "traditional historical methods supplemented by new methods", although it explains the meaning of the original sentence, doing so not only leads to unclear sentences, but also hinders readers' understanding. Therefore, the passive voice of the original sentence should be converted into the active voice of Chinese. Although the active voice is used in the Chinese translation, the passive meaning is still expressed. This translation method is mainly because the active voice is more consistent with the Chinese writing habits and is close to the language habits of Chinese readers. Only by fully grasping the differences between the two languages and utilizing them can translators achieve effective conversion between the two languages, thereby better serving the target language readers.

Example 13: Over the years, tools and technology themselves as a source of fundamental innovation have largely been ignored by historians and philosophers of science.

The passive voice is used in this sentence, but after it is translated into Chinese, the subject and predicate in the original sentence will remain unchanged, but in most cases, there is no sign of passivity in the translation. Considering the differences between Chinese and English languages, when translating English passive sentences, we mainly adopt the method of translating passive sentences into active sentences. Although the translation is in the form of an active sentence, like the original text, translated text expresses a passive meaning. In English, especially in scientific text, the passive voice is widely used to reflect the objectivity of the article, but Chinese is more accustomed to using the active voice, or taking the form of Active voice to express the meaning of passive. As in the original text, "have been ignored" means that these tools and technologies have been ignored by historians and philosophers. According to Chinese expression habits, it should be translated as "it is historians and philosophers who have ignored these tools and technologies". If only the passive sentence in the original text is translated

as "being…", it will make the translation obscure, stiff, and not in line with Chinese expression habits.

6. Conclusion

In summary, language change and development will not stop, and the corresponding translation methods are not constant. The fundamental aspect lies in the grasp of the sentence structures of the two languages. Although sentence structures are ever-changing, they cannot be separated from their roots. Only by fully understanding the differences between English and Chinese, comprehending their respective sentence characteristics and expression habits, can we achieve accuracy and refinement in the conversion between English and Chinese languages. This also requires translators to continuously learn and accumulate, only in this way can we deeply understand the differences in English and Chinese acquisition and translation practice, and always grasp the principles and laws in the process of English Chinese translation. We must consider all aspects comprehensively in order to achieve proficiency.

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