# A Contrastive Study on the Cohesive Devices of English and Chinese Novels——A Case Study of Flipped

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Abstract: Cohesion is a very important factor to form a text. The effective use of cohesive devices can make readers correctly understand text. Cohesive devices in Chinese and English is very different. Doing comparative research between the two languages, we can know about the distinction in Chinese and English. An excellent literary work must be closely related to the words it uses. The author would inevitably use a large number of cohesive devices to connect these words into easy to understand paragraphs in order to express characters' emotions. Flipped, an American movie has received high praise ever since it was released. The film was based on the novel of the same name authored by Wendelin Van Draanen. The novel was also a resounding critical success, yet it is ignored by the public. This article, based on the English original of Flipped by contemporary American writer Wendelin Van Draanen[2] and its only Chinese version, translated by Chen Changge[3], adopts Halliday's cohesion theory[1] as the theoretical foundation to study the cohesive devices in the second chapter of this novel. A systematic understanding of the cohesive devices of this youth literature can not only fill the gap in linguistic research on contemporary best-selling novels, but also facilitate readers' understanding of this novel.

**Keywords:** Contrastive Study in Chinese and English, Cohesive Devices, Flipped

## 1. Introduction

Cohesion is a very important factor to form a text. The analysis of the connection between sentences is based on the form of discourse. Halliday and Hasan (1976)[1] have put forward the cohesion theory and they hold that cohesion is relations of meaning that exist within the text. Cohesion consists in the cohesive devices signaling coherence within the discourse itself. An excellent literary work must be closely related to the words it uses. The author would inevitably use a large number of cohesive devices to connect these words into easy to understand paragraphs in order to express characters' emotions and set the exquisite plots. Contemporary stories, especially best-selling novels, are the most popular among young readers. Flipped, an American movie about the vague love between a young boy and a girl, has received high praise ever since it has been released. The film is based on a novel of the same name authored by Wendelin Van Draanen. The novel is also a resounding critical success, yet it is ignored by public. The linguistic research concerning this book is very rare. To the best of my knowledge, most studies are around the movie. The contrast of cohesion between English and Chinese in texts of Flipped would have important implications for linguistics and literature. For linguistic research, this study has analyzed cohesive devices in English novel and made a contrast between English and its Chinese version to spot the differences between those two languages. Different thinking modes of Chinese and western leading to diverse language characteristics in Chinese and English, therefore, it should has great influence on cohesion and coherence in Chinese and English discourse. What's more, according to Halliday's cohesion theory<sup>[1]</sup>, the coherence of a discourse depends on the cohesive devices used by the author. Contrast is a fundamental method to explore the distinction among different languages and is a important method in language study. Therefore, it is a necessitate to explore the features of cohesion in Chinese and English texts. For literary study, in addition, studies on classic works at home and abroad have been inundated, but there is a lack of research on contemporary best-selling novels. What's more, the novel Flipped is not only a youth literature telling romantic love, but also has profound meanings. The huge success of the film is based on the novel with the same name. Therefore, the present study could fill the gap on the research area concerning the contemporary novels.

This article, based on the English original of Flipped by contemporary American writer Wendelin Van Draanen<sup>[2]</sup> and its only Chinese version, translated by Chen Changge<sup>[3]</sup>, adopts Halliday's cohesion theory<sup>[1]</sup> as the theoretical foundation to study the cohesive devices in the second chapter of this novel. The goal of the current study is to contrast cohesive devices in English text and its Chinese translation version and find the distinctions between English and Chinese languages, taking contemporary American best-selling novel of Flipped of the second chapter as example. To achieve this purpose, the paper intends to answer the following questions:

- (1) What are cohesive devices mainly used in the English texts and its Chinese translation?
- (2) What differences of cohesive devices in Chinese and Western discourse and why?

## 2. Literature Review

The importance of contrast of cohesive devices in Chinese and English texts has long been recognized, as evidenced in the large number of studies that have examined the cohesive devices in the Chinese and English news (e.g., Zhao, 2020<sup>[4]</sup>; Qi, 2014<sup>[5]</sup>) or in the legal documents (e.g., Xie, 2021<sup>[6]</sup>; Zhou, 2016<sup>[7]</sup>), or in the speech texts (e.g., Jiang, 2016<sup>[8]</sup>; Peng, 2016<sup>[9]</sup>). These studies have mainly discussed the strategy of translation through analysis of cohesive devices. With the development of corpus, many studies based on the existed or self-established corpus to contrast cohesive devices between Chinese and English discourse (e.g., Chen, 2016<sup>[10]</sup>; Xu, 2015<sup>[11]</sup>; Yi & Hu, 2010<sup>[12]</sup>). These research have been conducted in terms of the use of adverb, theme-rheme relation and interactive theory. We can see that the main differences in the analysis and comparison of cohesive devices between English and Chinese texts lie in the different research materials, namely different discourse genres, such as news, speeches, government reports, fairy tales, etc., What's more, the research concerning the contrast of cohesive devices has shed light in the pedagogy. The typical example is that Zhao (2020)<sup>[13]</sup> has found that the comparison of English and Chinese cohesion is beneficial for improving English writing ability. Therefore, studies of cohesive devices in Chinese and English texts have been widely applied in many fields like the press, law, education more than linguistics, in which, analysis of literature has been highly recognized.

An excellent literary work must be closely related to the words it uses. The author would inevitably use a large number of cohesive devices to connect these words into easy to understand paragraphs in order to express characters' emotions and arrange the attracting plots. The study of cohesive devices in literature has always been a heated issue. Most studies have adopted Chinese novels as research materials to make a contrast with their English translations, some modern fictions like *Border Town* (Wu, 2006<sup>[14]</sup>), *Rickshaw Boy* (Liu, 2020<sup>[15]</sup>). And some classics like *A Dream of Red of Mansions* (Yang, 2020<sup>[16]</sup>). In addition, the importance of studies of cohesive devices in English novels are also recognized, for instance, *Vanity Fair* (Hu, 2017<sup>[17]</sup>; Meng, 2015<sup>[18]</sup>), *Great Expectation* (Yan, 2014<sup>[19]</sup>), *Jane Eyre* (Ma, 2008<sup>[20]</sup>). From the mentioned above, these studies have focused on the full-length novels in early modern times, yet research on contemporary novels has received little attention.

Contemporary stories, especially best-selling novels, are the most popular among young readers, however, there are few research on analysis of cohesive devices in this area. Zhang (2015)<sup>[21]</sup> has studied the cohesive devices of Netflix series of *House of Cards*. Cao (2012)<sup>[22]</sup> has contrasted cohesion between Chinese and English in dialogues of Harry Potter films. *Flipped* has received high praise ever since it was released. The film was based on a novel of the same name authored by Wendelin Van Draanen. The novel was also a resounding critical success, yet it is ignored by public. The linguistic research on this book is very rare. To the best of my knowledge, most studies are around the movie. For instance, analyzing the translation of subtitles based on skopos theory (Huang, 2013<sup>[23]</sup>), or based on eco-translatology (Chen, 2019<sup>[24]</sup>), or from functional equivalence theory (Luo, 2017<sup>[25]</sup>). Some research are from the pragmatic theory, such as the theories of Gricean cooperative principles and politeness (Wang, 2019<sup>[26]</sup>; Wei, 2022<sup>[27]</sup>). So far, there is still a lack of cohesive research concerning the novel.

### 3. Theoretical Framework

The present study has adopted Halliday and Hasan's cohesion model<sup>[1]</sup>. According to Halliday, cohesion is defined as "the concept of cohesion is a semantic one; it refers to relations of meaning that exist within the text and define it as a text" (p. 4). To realize a cohesive text, there is a need to apply cohesive devices in the text. Cohesion consists in the grammatical and lexical devices signaling

coherence within the discourse itself. The former covers four kinds of cohesive devices according to Halliday (1976, p. 189<sup>[1]</sup>): reference, substitution, ellipsis and conjunction. The later involves two types of devices: reiteration and collocation.

Because both spoken and written discourses display grammatical connections between individual clauses and utterances, the grammatical cohesion is needed. In terms of the grammatical cohesion, four types of cohesive devices are involved. The first is reference. It means the use of a word or words to identify someone or something. "Reference items in English include pronouns (e.g., he, she, it, they), demonstratives (e.g., this, that, these, those), the articles (e.g., the, a)" (McCarthy, p. 35<sup>[28]</sup>). The second one is substitution, which means the use of pro-forms to replace the words or phrases in the surrounding text. There are three types of substitution: nominal (e.g., one, ones, the same), verbal (e.g., do, do so), clausal (e.g., I think so, I hope not). The next is ellipsis, which refers to zero substitution, i.e., omission of certain elements. Usually, it is achieved through omitting noun heads or modifiers, verb phrases and the whole clauses. The last one is conjunction, which signals a relationship between segments of the discourse. The use of adverbs and prepositions can realize conjunction between sentences.

The lexical cohesion is defined as "related vocabulary items occur across clause and sentence boundaries in written texts and across act, move and turn boundaries in speech. (McCarthy, p. 65<sup>[28]</sup>). It involves two types: reiteration and collocation. Reiteration means "occurrence of the word in the form of the original word, synonym or near-synonym, etc., to connect one sentence to another" (McCarthy, p. 65<sup>[28]</sup>), which has six categories: repetition, synonymy, hyponymy, meronymy, general word and superordinate. Collocation is referred to the probability that lexical items will co-occur, and is not a semantic relation between words, which includes antonymy and complementary categories.

Since both grammatical and lexical cohesion are mixed in this selected discourse, this article discusses the two types of cohesive devices used in the English original text and its Chinese translation respectively, in order to find out how Chinese translators handle the cohesive devices used in the English original text.

## 4. Analysis of Flipped Based on Halliday's Cohesion Model

# 4.1 Data Collection

The movie *Flipped*, has won a high reputation and attracted some scholars to conduct research on it. However, the novel with the same name has always been neglected. The novel, *Flipped*, is full of discourse on mental states and events. The book unfolds the story from the dual perspectives, involving a large number of paragraphs depicting the boy's and the girl's internal monologue. This approach to description has exquisitely described emotions of the boy and the girl, presented the comprehensive picture of the events as well. No doubt its success emerges from the use of cohesive devices. Therefore, this paper has selected the novel of *Flipped* as the analysis data, focusing on chapter two of this book.

This article takes the second chapter of the novel as the object for research, mainly considering these aspects:

Firstly, concerning the words and rich plots, the second chapter is about mental description of the two protagonists. Description of the changes in the mental states of characters requires a lot of cohesive devices, which provide a sufficient materials for analysis. Secondly, the content of Chapter Two only includes the internal monologue of the two protagonists without others, which is convenient for analysis. The Chinese translation below is the corresponding translation of the original text mentioned above.

# 4.2 Data Analysis

The following paragraphs are selected from Chapter 2 of *Flipped*. The first paragraph is the original English text, and its Chinese translation is below.

(1) The first day I met Bryce Loski, I flipped. Honestly, one look at him and I became a lunatic. It's his eyes. Something in his eyes. They're blue, and framed in the blackness of his lashes, they're dazzling. Absolutely breathtaking.

On the first day I met Bryce Loski, I flipped. Well, actually, I fell completely in love with him at first sight. It's because of his eyes. There was something in his look. He has a pair of blue eyes that

flicker under his black eyelashes, making me hold my breath.

This paragraph is about Julie's inner monology. In the example given, the word "eyes" are repeated twice, which suggests that the lexical cohesive device of repetition is applied. Yet, it should be noticed that the first word "eyes" has different meaning from the second one. The former one refers to "a part of human body", while the later one means "eyesight". What's more, the author has also used personal pronoun "they" to refer to "eyes" in order to avoid repetition. From this description of Bryce's appearance, it can be seen that Julie was impressed by Bryce's eyes and that was the reason why Julie liked him.

In the Chinese translation version, the repetition device of the original English version is also used. Yet, the translator has made a distinction between "eyes" and "look". The word "eyes" is repeated in different sentences, for the theme of this paragraph is about "eyes". Therefore, the non-structural cohesion is achieved.

(2) At the time I didn't think there was anything better than kicking a soccer ball around, especially not the likes of laundry or dishes or vacuuming, but my mother didn't agree. And the danger of being home alone with her was that she'd recruit me to help her wash or dust or vacuum.

For me back then, there was nothing better than playing football, especially compared to washing clothes and dishes, and mopping the floor. But my mother didn't agree. There was a danger that she would make me to force me to help her wash clothes and dishes, and mop the floor if I staying alone at home with my mother.

In this example, the word "laundry" and "wash" are in the relationship of synonymy. The word "dishes" and "dust" are the near-synonymous words. In addition, the word "vacuuming" is repeated in its noun form "vacuum". These three types of reiteration are the typical example of lexical cohesion.

In the Chinese version, the verb phrases of "washing clothes", "washing dishes", and "mopping the floor" are repeated twice in the same forms. The repetition has achieved non-structural cohesion.

(3) Literally, it was weeks. I entertained myself by playing soccer with our dog, Champ. Mostly he'd just block because a dog can't exactly kick and score, but once in a while he'd dribble with his nose. The scent of a ball must overwhelm a dog, though, because Champ would eventually try to chomp it, then lose the ball tome.

Really, it was a few weeks. For entertain myself, I started to kick the ball with my dog Champ. In most times, he could pounce on the ball only, after all, a dog couldn't kick the ball. Yet, sometimes he could stab the ball with his nose. But the smell of a ball must be an irresistible temptation for a dog, because Champ often eventually tried to eat the ball and then lose the ball.

In this example, there are a series of verbs like "play", "kick", "score", "dribble", "chomp" and "lose" constitute the semantic field of "playing soccer". These verbs have depicted a vivid and dynamic picture concerning a dog playing a ball, full of childishness and playfulness. In addition, the word "ball" includes "soccer", therefore, they are homonymous words.

In the Chinese version, Chen does not distinguish "soccer" from "ball", and both "soccer" and "ball" are translated into "ball". Therefore, the feature of the original English, i.e., hyponymy between the superordinate of "ball" and its hyponym of "soccer" is not maintained. What's more, a series of verbs such as "kick", "pounce on", "stab", "eat", "lose the ball" are grouped into a lexical chain, which maintained the feature of the original text.

(4) It was her hair. She had mountains of it, twisted this way or that, clipped or beaded, braided or swirled. Her ponytails rivaled the ones on carousel horses.

But her hair. She has so much hair, sometimes curled up this way, sometimes curled up that way; Cut it short and embellished it with pearl flowers; Sometimes braided, sometimes twisted into a bun. Her ponytails were similar to the tail of a carousel.

In the example above, the words "twisted", "clipped", "beaded", "braided", "swirled" constitute the same lexical chain of hairdo. In this way, the coherent meaning around the "hair" among sentences are presented. In addition, the word "ponytails" is included in the "braided hair" which indicate the relation of hyponymy.

In the Chinese version, the two distinctive features of lexical chain are finely maintained, i.e., "curled up this way", "curled up that way", "Cut it short", "embellished it with pearl flowers", "braided", "twisted into a bun" are grouped into a chain around the theme of "hairdo", and the relation

of hyponymy, i.e., "ponytails" is included in "braided".

(5) Then in the fifth grade Shelly Stalls came into the picture. Shelly Stalls is a ninny. A whiny, gossipy, backstabbing ninny who says one thing to one person and the opposite to another.

In fifth grade, suddenly a Shirley Stalls appeared. She is a fool, and likes grumbling, gossiping and backbiting. She often says one thing to a person and the same thing in opposite to another person.

In the given example, the name "Shelly Stalls" are repeated twice. And the word "ninny" has appeared twice in the two different sentences respectively. The same language unit in different sentences has the function of inter-structural cohesion (Zhu, Zheng & Miao,  $200^{[29]}$ ). The twice use of the word "ninny" and "Shelly Stall" shows the Julie's loath toward Shelly. What's more, the word "whiny", "gossipy" and "backstabbing" constitute a lexical chain, belonging to the same semantic field of "ninny", and these three adjectives are all used to describe the person who has poor character. It is not difficult to see that a coherent meaning and rich emotion of character are presented.

In the Chinese version, the feature of repetition is not maintained. The name of "Shelly Stalls" is substituted by the personal pronoun "she". And then, the word "ninny" is translated differently, i.e., "fool" and the pronoun "she", and the affection of dislike is deeper in this way. What's more, "grumbling", "gossiping" and "backbiting", the above phrases construct a lexical chain. It should be noticed that Chen has added the word "likes" to the adjectives in the original text, which could benefit Chinese readers to understand the meaning from the coherent context. While in English version, the word "like" is omitted, in order to highlight some important information like Shelly's characters.

(6) Mom had given her the beautiful lemon Bundt cake that was supposed to be our dessert that night. The powdered sugar looked soft and white, and the cake was still warm, sending sweet lemon smells into the air.

Mom gave her a beautiful baked lemon cake, which is probably my dessert for tonight. The frosting on it looks white and soft, and the cake is still hot, emitting a sweet lemon aroma.

In this example, the word "dessert" and "lemon Bundt cake" are in the hyponymy, in which, "dessert" is the superordinate of "lemon Bundt cake". Furthermore, the author has used "the cake" to refer to "the lemon Bundt cake". These two phrases are synonymous words, and in the relation of synonymy.

In this example, the "baked lemon cake" is replaced by "dessert" in the first time and is shortened to "the cake" in the second time. "The cake"and "dessert" constitute the relationship of synonym. The word "cake" includes "baked lemon cake", which forms a hyponymy in the context. This relationship is surely also maintained in the Chinese version.

## 4.3 Discussion

From the above examples, we can see that both Chinese and English writers have used rich lexical cohesive devices in the novel, and the same lexical cohesive devices are maintained in its Chinese translation. More specifically, it can be concluded that the cohesive devices of lexical cohesion is utilized frequently in English and in its Chinese version, in which, reiteration is most used. Under reiteration, repetition is rarely used while synonymy (e.g., cake-dessert), near-synonymy (e.g., dishesdust) and hyponymy (e.g., soccer-ball) of the relations are more common. Meanwhile, under collocation, the lexical chain is more common which means that words tend to co-occur in the same semantic field or form the same series, for instance "whiny", "gossipy" and "backstabbing".

Although the Chinese translator has maintained the feature of cohesion in the English original in the most cases, due to the fact that English and Chinese are two different languages with different language characteristics, there are also significant differences in the use of lexical cohesion between the English original and its Chinese translated version.

Firstly, English tends to express the same meaning through the use of synonymous words to avoid repetition, while Chinese translator tends to repeat the words with the same meaning. For example, both laundry and wash are translated as "wash clothes", while "soccer" and "ball"can be interchanged in English. It can be seen that Chinese translation may use two or more lexical connections to translate them in English, because English tends to use one word to express certain concepts, while Chinese uses a phrase to express concepts.

Secondly, ellipsis is mostly used in English while Chinese tend to fill the meaning-blank. For

instance, "a whiny, gossipy, backstabbing ninny who says one thing to one person and the opposite to another" in English is translated into "she is a fool, who likes grumbling, gossiping and backbiting. She often says one thing to a person and the same thing in opposite to another person." in Chinese.

Thirdly, English tends to apply grammatical cohesive devices to avoid repetition and create coherence, while Chinese tend to adopt repetition or reiteration of lexical cohesive devices. For instance, "eyes" is substituted by "they", while they are still repeated as "eyes" in Chinese, and "kick" and "dribble" are synonymous words, which are both translated into "kick the ball". In conclusion, English is rich in words, avoiding repetition of the same word. While Chinese is an analytical language, with fewer lexis than English, and less diversity in usage than English. Moreover, Chinese discourse emphasizes symmetry and neatness, so Chinese often uses the same words to reproduce, while English often uses synonyms.

#### 5. Conclusions

The novel *Flipped* is full of description concerning mental states and dialogues, which shows rich emotion of boys and girls. A large number of cohesive devices can present a coherent story as the psychological activities of characters constantly change. The use of lexical cohesion in English and Chinese texts has both similarities and distinctions. When translating English text, the Chinese translator tends to present the original work to the reader, yet for the two languages have their own language characteristics with the different the way of thinking, so the focus of cohesive devices used is different: English emphasizes hypotaxis and changes in lexical form; Chinese focuses on on parataxis, and symmetry. Therefore, when translating English texts, the first is to study the cohesive devices of the original text, considering either directly using the cohesive of the original or using devices more suitable for Chinese characteristics to translate the text.

Cohesive device is an important tool for forming a meaningful and complete discourse. Understanding the lexical connection between two languages has certain implications for our discourse analysis and E-C translation. Using various lexical cohesive devices can help us use language more accurately, and shape a discourse that is semantically coherent.

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