Language Transformation in Interpretation Between Chinese and English

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Abstract
There exist huge differences between Chinese and English, particularly in terms of syntactic structures. In order to have a good transformation between these two languages, interpreters should know the differences and apply the knowledge in the interpretation process. With specific examples, this paper explores the differences between these two languages in the following aspects: hypotaxis in English Vs. parataxis in Chinese; subject-prominent structure in English Vs. topic-prominent structure in Chinese; Preposition of modifiers in Chinese Vs. Postposition of modifiers in English; passive voice in English Vs. active voice in Chinese; compound sentences and complex sentences; cultural context differences between English and Chinese.

Key words: Language transformation; Interpretation; English; Chinese

INTRODUCTION

Language transformation is a key step in interpretation process. The greater the differences are between the source language and the target language, the more difficult the interpretation process is. English and Chinese belong to different language families: English belongs to Indo-European language family, while Chinese belongs to Sino-Tibetan language family. There is no kinship between the two languages, which result in great differences in pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, cultural context, rhetoric, pragmatics, etc. Therefore, it is particularly important for interpreters to be familiar with the characteristics of English and Chinese, particularly the differences in their syntactic structures in order to achieve a rapid bilingual transformation and improve the quality of interpretation.

1. HYPOTAXIS IN ENGLISH VS. PARATAXIS IN CHINESE

Hypotaxis and parataxis are two approaches of language organization. Hypotaxis means organizing and connecting sentences by means of linguistic forms (such as conjunctions and relational words); Parataxis refers to the organization of language by the word meaning and logical relations. One of the main features of English is that it emphasizes the form and structure. English is always compared as grapevine. Various attributives, adverbials and complements could be seen in English simple sentences, while in compound and complex sentences, all kinds of clauses are used to deliver intricate meanings. In a word, English mainly relies on grammatical devices (such as conjunctions) to organize. Chinese is often compared as a bamboo, which indicates that most of Chinese language is composed of short sentences, which are connected by the internal semantic and logical relations. Therefore, when interpreting from Chinese to English, interpreters need to understand the core meaning of the original speech and make full use of connectives and other grammatical means to organize the interpretation so as to conform to the characteristics of "hypotaxis" in English. When interpreting from English

to Chinese, interpreters need break the long sentences into short sentences, and transform the explicit logical relations by reducing the grammatical connective words when necessary.

Example1.

我们将深入贯彻落实科学发展观，转变经济发展方式，切实推动经济发展由粗放型向集约型转变，促进国民经济又好又快地发展。

Interpretation：We will apply the scientific outlook on development *and* transform the mode of economic growth from extensive to intensive, *so as to* achieve a sound and rapid development of national economy. (Add the conjunctions: *and, so as to*)

Example2.

If you want to speak on the subject, you are most welcome.

Interpretation：欢迎发言。 (*If* is omitted)

Example 3.

As the weather was fine, we decided to hold the reception in the open air.

Interpretation：天气不错，我们决定举办露天招待会。(*As* is omitted)

2. SUBJECT-PROMINENT STRUCTURE IN ENGLISH VS. TOPIC- PROMINENT STRUCTURE IN CHINESE

Another major feature of English sentence structure is that subject plays a key role. Except for imperative sentences, English sentences can hardly lack subject. Therefore, when organizing English sentences, we should first determine the subject, which regulates the following predicate in terms of person and number. This is what we often call "subject-predicate agreement", which means no matter how complicated an English sentence is, it is always expanded from a basic subject-predicate-structure sentence. The subject in English is always served by a noun, a nominal phrase or a nominal clause. Other parts in the sentence are attached to this basic structure by various means, such as prepositions, conjunctions and infinitive verbs, which leads to the existence of a great number of long sentences in English. In other words, English is a subject-prominent language.

Unlike English, Chinese is described as a topic-prominent language, because it is the topic not the subject that plays a prominent role in Chinese sentence structure. The topic is the message the speaker wants to convey. In Chinese, the components appearing before the predicate verb can be either subject or topic. Grammatically speaking, words, phrases and sentences can serve as topic matters. Whether there is a subject in a sentence or not doesn't matter, as long as it has a topic. For example, "准备这批货物，需要半个月的时间." In this sentence, the topic element is the verb phrase "准备这批货物 (prepare these goods)", and "需要半个月的时间 (take half a month)" is the description of the topic. In the sentence "他以为这桩交易可以瞒天过海，她却不这么认为。" , the topic is a short sentence.

Based on the above differences, in the process of Chinese-English interpretation, interpreters should first determine the subject of the sentence, and then form the basic structure of "subject-predicate ". when interpreting Chinese sentences without subject, it is necessary to convert topic-prominent Chinese into subject-prominent structure by adding subject appropriately. In the process of English-Chinese interpretation, Interpreters should find out the type of subject, and when necessary, topicalize the sentence by omitting the subject of the sentence and place a topic in it. While conforming to Chinese expression habits, interpreters should be faithful to the original speech.

Example 1.

不到长城非好汉。

Interpretation：*He* who has never been to the Great Wall is not a true man. (Add the subject *"He"*)

Example 2:

在降低农业成本的同时，还应该采取措施以增加农民的收入。

Interpretation：While lowering the farming cost, *the government* should take measures to increase farmers' income. (Add the subject "*the government*")

Example 3:

You are kindly requested to let us have your lowest quotation for the following Models:

Interpretation：请提供以下型号产品的最低报价。(Omit the subject "*You*")

Example 4:

I have some latest information about this case.

Interpretation：关于这个案件，我有一些最新的信息。 (Topicalize the sentence)

3. PREPOSITION OF MODIFIERS IN CHINESE VS. POSTPOSITION OF MODIFIERS IN ENGLISH

English has an open sentence structure with prepositions, participles, infinitive verbs, clauses placed after the central words. However, in Chinese, modifiers, like attributives and adverbials usually precede the central words. The different locations of modifiers bring some difficulties to interpretation job. The interpreter is suggested to adjust the word order of a sentence by changing the position of modifiers in order to conform to the expressive habits of the target language. In Chinese-English translation, the structure of "subject+predicate+object" of a sentence should be set up first, then the longer modifier should be placed after the central words according to the English language rule. When interpreting from English to Chinese, it is necessary to divert the long modifiers into short sentences.

Example1:

北京奥运会的成功举办，促进了奥林匹克精神的传播，激发了亿万中国民众参与体育活动的热情。

Interpretation：The success of the Beijing Olympics has greatly increased the impact *of* Olympic spirit, aroused the enthusiasm *of* hundreds of millions of Chinese people in sport. (Relocate the modifiers with *"of"* structure)

Example 2:

Many rare animals are disappearing because of the severe pollution.

Interpretation：由于污染严重，许多珍稀动物正在濒临灭绝。 (Place the modifier at the beginning of the sentence.)

Example 3:

I call upon Paralympic athletes from all over the world to meet in London in four years' time when once again you will inspire and excite the world with your sporting excellence.

Interpretation：在此，我号召来自世界各地的残奥健儿们四年之后相聚伦敦，届时愿你们再次展现高超的体育竞技水平，振奋人心，感动世界。 (Split the adverbial clause of time into short sentences.)

4. PASSIVE VOICE IN ENGLISH VS. ACTIVE VOICE IN CHINESE

Both English and Chinese have active and passive voice structures. Generally speaking, passive voice structures are used more frequently in English. In Chinese, passive voice is not used so often, but more flexibly. In addition to the word "被 (bei）", words like "由(*you*)，让 (*rang*)，受 (*shou*)，遭受 (*zaoshou*)" contain passive meanings . Chinese is a parataxis-orientated language. Therefore, in Chinese-English interpretation, as long as the source language expresses the passive meaning, it can be translated into English passive structure. On the contrary, when interpreting from English to Chinese, interpreters should deal with the sentence pattern flexibly according to the context. He can either change the passive voice into active voice or use suitable words to express the passive meaning.

Example 1:

要动员所有利益相关方参与其中，既要普及新技术，又要研发适合不同地区特点的技术。

Interpretation：*All stakeholders must be mobilized* to participate in disseminating new technologies and developing technologies that serve the special needs of different regions. (Change the original sentence into passive voice)

Example 2:

It is generally believed that Hongkong will continue to keep its prosperity and stability after its return to China.

Interpretation：人们普遍相信香港回归中国后会继续保持繁荣与稳定。 (Convert the passive voice into active voice)

Example 3:

Much of the most important environmental litigation is brought by public interest groups.

Interpretation：大部分重要的环境诉讼都是由公共利益集团提出的。 (Use"由(*you*)" to express passive meaning)

5. COMPOUND SENTENCES AND COMPLEX SENTENCES

Compared with simple sentences, compound and complex sentences can express more complicated semantic and logical relations. English compound sentences often use coordinating conjunctions (and, or, but, yet, etc.) to connect simple sentences. In English complex sentences, subordinate conjunctions and relative pronouns are used to connect the main clause and the subordinate clause, such as "since, because" (cause and effect); if (condition); when, while (time); etc. The conjunctions of attributive clauses include that, which, where, who, etc. In contrast, conjunctions are occasionally used in Chinese compound and complex sentences. Chinese language relies more on word order and semantic logic to connect clauses. Therefore, when interpreting from Chinese to English, Interpreters should understand and clarify the logical relationship between sentences, choose appropriate conjunctions, use grammatical means like prepositions and participle, or convert the parts of speech to form a compound or complex sentence. In English-Chinese interpretation, interpreters are suggested to reorganize the sentence structure by splitting the sentence and omitting the conjunctions if needed so that the interpretation can be more fluent and coherent.

In complex sentences, attributive clauses and adverbial clauses are the most difficult ones for interpreters. According to the grammatical rules of English, attributive clauses and adverbial clauses are placed after the central word. However, in Chinese attributive and adverbial modifiers are placed before the central word. If the interpreter does not adjust the sentence structure in the process of interpretation, the target language will become much too lengthy. Therefore, when interpreting long attributive clauses and adverbial clauses, the interpreter needs to adjust the sentence order and divert the longer clauses into short sentences.

Example1:

从现在来看，世界经济形势复苏态势日渐明朗，参展企业信心不断增强，采购商应邀踊跃，各方面的反馈都肯定了我们对本届广交会较为乐观的判断。

Interpretation：Now, there have been *clear signs of global economic recovery, increasing confidence of exhibitors and active participation of purchasers, which* affirm our optimistic perspective of this year's Canton Fair. (Convert the verb phrase into noun phrase; add an attributive clause with "which".)

Example 2:

As a government, we are fighting illegal drugs by cutting off supplies and reducing demand through anti-drug education program.

Interpretation：作为政府，我们正在切断毒品的来源，并以反毒教育来减少对毒品的需求，同毒品做斗争。(Reorganize the sentence structure by splitting the sentence.)

Example 3:

I.M. Pei, the great architect who built the John F. Kennedy Library in Boston, along with many other notable buildings, said that he hoped people who went to the Kennedy Library experienced "revived hope and promise for the future."

Interpretation：杰出的建筑师贝聿铭设计建造了波士顿的约翰.F.肯尼迪图书馆等许多著名的建筑。他曾说，他希望到肯尼迪图书馆参观的人能够"重新燃起对未来的希望和信念。"(reorganize the sentence structure by splitting the sentence.)

6. CULTURAL CONTEXT DIFFERENCES BETWEEN ENGLISH AND CHINESE

In addition to linguistic differences, the cultural contexts of English and Chinese also differ. Differences in national habits, thinking patterns and emotional management are all reflected in the language usage, like vocabulary, grammar, and discourse, which creates difficulty in interpretation.

Interpreters are always baffled with idiom translation, humor processing, and euphemism translation. Therefore, interpreters should read extensively, fully understand the differences between English and Chinese cultural contexts and prepare corresponding interpretation strategies so as to deliver both the speaker's message and emotion properly.

Example 1:

Exporting to some countries is greatly complicated by all of *the red tape.*

Interpretation：政府部门的繁文缛节使得向某些国家的出口贸易困难重重。

(Cultural context: *red tape* originally refers to the red band used by British lawyers and government officials to tie documents, and later refers to "government procedures".)

Example 2:

I am grateful for this meeting. *I love you.* I'm proud of you.

Interpretation：感谢你参加这次会议。<u>我很敬重你</u>。

(Cultural context: This conversation happened between a former U.S. president and the chairman of a local residents' association in a public service event. Unlike American people, Chinese people are more emotionally restraint. If "I love you" is literally translated into "我爱你", it does not conform to this cultural characteristic.)

Example 3:

God knows how hard it is to say precisely what it is that a piece of music means.

Interpretation：天知道要想准确地描述一支乐曲的含义有多难。

(Cultural context: God in English refers to the omnipotent God in Christian culture. In order to avoid the risk of religious misunderstanding, it is more appropriate to translate "God" into "天",which is thought to be mighty in Chinese Culture.)

CONCLUSION

Understanding the syntactical and cultural differences between English and Chinese can help interpreters to have a good language transformation in the interpretation process. A good interpreter should have a high grammatical and cross-cultural sensitivity, which requires intensive practice. By listening and reading authentic materials, like speeches, news, biographies, science books, etc. interpreters will enhance the skills of sentence organization. Consequently, a more coherent and fluent version of interpretation will be delivered.

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