

A Study on the Translation Strategies of Chinese Run-on Sentences From the Perspective of Functional Equivalence Theory

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According to the theory of functional equivalence, this study explores the translation strategies of Chinese run-on sentences not only from the aspect of the vocabulary and grammar of the English and Chinese languages, but also from the viewpoint of the stylistic style, language expression habits, and discourse style of the English translation. Through the analysis of some typical run-on sentences, two major steps in translating Chinese run-on sentences are discussed in terms of both thought and practice, including thinking about getting rid of the limitation of sentence numbers and carrying out logical restructuring to find out the topic sentence; on the basis of restructuring, the practice of topic-by-topic translation is carried out, i.e., the topic sentence in the run-on sentence is treated as the main sentence in the translation, and the non-topic sentence is treated as the subordinate sentence in the translation. The translation strategies include the use of correlatives, compound sentences, prepositional phrases, and addition and subtraction of translations.

Keywords: Chinese run-on sentences, functional equivalence theory, translation strategies

Introduction

The Chinese run-on sentence is a linguistic phenomenon unique to China. It is not easy to translate because of its loose structure, the lack of associated words, and its similarity to the form. The term “run-on sentences” was first proposed by Lv (1979) in his analysis of Chinese grammar and he claims that the use of small sentences as the basic unit, without the use of sentences, is more suitable for the Chinese language, because there are especially many running sentences in spoken Chinese, one after another, and there are many places where they can be broken and connected. B. Zhang, Fan, and Y. J. Zhang (2002) pointed out that a run-on sentence consists of at least two independent sentence segments, which are generally not connected to each other by associative words. In addition, English does not have a syntactic structure similar to the structure of Chinese run-on sentences, as Chinese is a “bamboo language” that focuses on meaningful agreement and generally follows the chronological order of events, with simple sentences and no variation in form. In contrast, English is a category of “tree language” which often uses the subject, predicate, and object as the central framework to convey the central meaning of the sentence, and has a rich variety of forms (Zhao, 2016). On top of that, Wang et al. (2017) pointed out that Chinese is a topic-based language, characterized by chunkiness, dispersion, and zero-reference.

Although many scholars in China have explored the translation techniques of Chinese run-on sentences, most of them only put forward some translation methods of run-on sentences in a general way, and there are few studies on the translation of different types of run-on sentences. It is hoped that this study can provide some strategies for the English translation of different types of Chinese run-on sentences, and provide some reference for the future English translation of Chinese run-on sentences.

Functional Equivalence Theory

The theory of functional equivalence was first proposed by the American linguist and translator Eugene A. Nida. He proposed that the quality and reliability of a translation should be judged not only on the level of vocabulary and grammar, but also on the equivalence between the translational and the original text in terms of style, language expression, discourse, and so on (Nida, 1975). It can be said that the higher the quality of the translation, the easier it will be for the recipient to accept and understand the translation. A high degree of functional equivalence is achieved if the recipient of the translation comprehends the translation to a similar or the same extent as the recipient of the original text.

The English and Chinese languages differ in many ways, such as word, syntax, discourse, and rhetoric. Therefore, in the process of translation, a translator should pay attention to these differences and should not lose sight of the accuracy of the content in order to preserve the formal equivalence between the two languages, thus leading to a lack of reproduction of the information in the source language. Therefore, when translating, especially when translating Chinese run-on sentences, the translator should overcome the rigid formal correspondence between the two languages and pursue a natural and culturally appropriate way of presenting the translation that is close to the expressions of the two languages. This study presents a selection of Chinese run-on sentences and their translation version. Based on these vivid examples, the English translation strategy of Chinese running sentences is explored in detail at the level of English-Chinese syntactic comparison (Sun, 2007) and through the theory of functional equivalence.

Classification of Chinese Run-on Sentences

Based on classification method of run-on sentences of Wang and Zhao (2017), the study explores the translation strategies and techniques of various run-on sentences. Wang and Zhao (2017) proposed that subject designation is the main basis for the classification of the structural types of run-on sentences, i.e., whether the subjects of the segments of Chinese run-on sentences are consistent with each other, and outlines three basic structural types of run-on sentences: The first type is called “single-subject run-on sentences” consisting of only one subject. The second type is called “multiple-subject run-on sentences” composed of multiple subjects alternating. And the last one is called “complex-subject run-on sentences” bearing with multiple subjects, no subjects, and even co-occurring phrases. In the case of single-subject run-on sentences, all the segments share a single subject. In the prose style, the text is short and concise, and the same subject usually exists only once in a paragraph, i.e., if the subject appears in one paragraph, the subject is omitted from the rest of the paragraph. In terms of where the subject is omitted, single-subject run-on sentences are divided into three types: single-subject omitted before, omitted after, and omitted before and after. A pre-phrase omission means that the subject appears in the front of the passage and the subject is omitted in the middle or at the back; a post-phrase omission means that the subject does not appear until the end of the passage; and a pre-phrase and post-phrase omission means that the subject appears in the middle of the passage and is omitted before and after the paragraph. Multi-subject

run-on sentences are more complex in structure, with different subjects each having their own role and not interfering with each other, and when the same subject is repeatedly identified, it can be omitted and formed as a separate paragraph.

The last type is the extraordinarily long, complex subject run-on sentence. This type of run-on sentence appears more frequently in prose and is more difficult to translate into English, requiring the translator to have a thorough grounding in the syntactic differences between English and Chinese and to take maximum advantage of the translator's subjectivity.

Methods

This study aims to explore the translation strategy of Chinese run-on sentences. The study is guided in terms of the functional equivalence theory and tends to answer the following research question: What specific translation strategies can be used in the course of translating the Chinese run-on sentences?

Data Collection

Data collection included the vivid run-on example sentences and the translation version. The data were collected from the book—*English Translation of Selected Modern Chinese Prose (I)* by Zhang Peiji (2007). Some typical run-on sentences were selected for further analysis. And the translation strategies were further obtained from the text analysis.

Analysis and Results

The translation strategies of Chinese run-on sentences proposed in this study are mainly based on two procedures: Firstly, at the level of thought, the logical restructuring is carried out to find out the topic sentence by getting rid of the limitation of the full stop (Zeng, 2021). It is worth mentioning that when run-on sentences contain more than one sentence, the topic sentence is usually not unique; secondly, from the practicality level, on the basis of reorganization, topic-by-topic translation is carried out, i.e., the topic sentence in Chinese is treated as the main sentence in the translation, and the non-topic sentence in Chinese is treated as the subordinate structure in the translation. A discussion of specific translation strategies for run-on sentences at the practicality level can be found below.

Using Compound Sentences and Prepositional Phrases

Example 1

Source text: ①他四处奔走的寻找。②他想找个洞, ③躲开身子, ④把石头堵住洞口, ⑤隐退的蛻壳。

Translation text: 1. He ran around trying to find a cave to hide. And 2. He is going to block the hole, so that he can molt secretly.

Example 1 is a single-subject run-on sentence with two sentences, consisting of five clauses. Of these, Clauses ②, ③, ④, and ⑤ are single-subjective omitted. The source text lacks correlatives and is relatively loosely structured. The sentence breaks are unclear and logically confused. Chinese is a topic-based language, and, as can be seen from the example sentences, the amount of information contained in this run-on sentence makes it difficult to determine that the topic is unique, so the translation of this run-on sentence must contain multiple sentences to cover different topics. In terms of translation strategy: Firstly, the translation reorganizes the confusing logic of the original text, with Clauses ①, ②, and ③ being combined into one sentence; and Clauses ④ and ⑤ are combined into one sentence; and Secondly, the translation follows the divided logical sentence segments paragraph by paragraph. The translator has divided the two sentences of the original text into

two different sentences, in which the phrase “想找个洞” is replaced by the prepositional phrase “to find a cave”, which to a large extent saves a large amount of space. Additionally, some sentences contain a purposive relationship, for example, Clause 2 treats the original text as a subordinate clause expressing a purpose relationship, and “blocking the hole” is to “molt”. The translation uses the conjunction “so that” to make the logic of the translation clearer and tighter, in order to comply with the aggregation characteristics of the English language, so that the reader, when reading the translation version, gets a similar response as the reader of the original text.

Using Methods of Additions and Subtractions

Example 2

Source text: ①我们过了江, ②进了车站。③我买了票, ④他忙着带行李。⑤行李太多, ⑥得给脚夫打点小费, ⑦才能过关。

Translation text: 1. We entered the railway station after crossing the river. 2. While I was buying a ticket at the ticket office, my father looked after my luggage. And 3. There was so much luggage that he had to bargain with the porter.

The source text in Example 2 contains multiple subjects of “we”, “I”, “he”, and “luggage”, which is a multiple subject alternating sentence. The original text does not need to be reorganized by logical judgement, and the translation is broken in the same way as the original. The subject of Clauses ⑥ and ⑦ has zero reduplication, and the translation has only one clear subject, with proper use of related words and tight connections. Adding the subject “he” to the Clause 3 transforms the Chinese parataxis to the English parataxis. From the perspective of translation, it is clear that Clause 1 lacks a correlative to indicate the sequence of “过了江” and “进了车站”. Here, it is clear that “crossed the river” is followed by “entered the railway station”; moreover, in English, “we entered...after...” is a more appropriate method in dealing with this sentence. The word “while” is utilized to link the actions of the two people, and the act of buying the ticket is regarded as the topic of the sentence, and treated as the main clause. As the Chinese run-on sentences lack associated words and have a loose structure, and the content is a mishmash of important information, less important information, and unimportant information, it is necessary to make appropriate additions, deletions, or translations according to the actual situation in order to achieve functional equivalence between the translation and the original text (Wang & Wu, 2019; Hu & Liu, 2021).

Preserving the Style of the Source Text

Example 3

Source text: ①但是, ②聪明的, ③你告诉我, ④为什么我们的日子就没有了? ⑤是有人偷了他们罢: ⑥那到底是什么人? ⑦又藏在什么地方呢? ⑧是他们自己逃出来的: ⑨现在又到那儿去了?

Translation text: 1. But tell me, your wise man, why are our days gone forever? 2. Maybe they have been stolen. 3. But who would it be and where would he hide them? And 4. Perhaps they just ran away by themselves. 5. But where could they be now?

Example 3 contains multiple subjects, phrases, and unattributed sentences, making it the most complex run-on sentence. The translation replaces the four original sentences with five sentences. The translation observes the principle of subject-verb agreement in Clause ④, separating “tell me” and “you wise man” with a comma. This creates a sense of helplessness and indignation similar to that of the original text, thus creating a functional equivalence with the original text in terms of style. The use of “who could it be” and “where could they be” in

Clauses 3 and 5 expresses doubt and uncertainty about the original text. Overall, the stylistic style of the translation also matches the style of the running sentences in this paragraph, with concise and unobtrusive diction. It is important to achieve functional equivalence between the translation and the original. When necessary, the translation needs to be translated by means of co-translation, retranslation, and additional translation, in order to ensure that the translation achieves the same effect in terms of style, language expression habits, and discourse style.

Conclusion

Due to the difference of syntax between English and Chinese, and the lack of corresponding sentence patterns in English, the work of English-Chinese running sentences is even more difficult (Chen, 2018). This study discusses the translation strategy of run-on sentences based on three types of subject designation, and points out that the translation strategy follows two steps: Firstly, to get rid of the limitation of number of the sentence and carry out logical restructuring to find the topic sentence; and secondly, to carry out topic-by-topic translation, i.e., to treat the topic sentence in Chinese as the main sentence in the translation, and to treat the non-topic sentence in Chinese as the subordinate clause in the translation. Three major translation strategies are summarized in this study, including the use of compound sentences or prepositional phrases, appropriate addition or subtraction, and the preservation of the original style. However, this study also has some limitations. The number of run-on sentences selected is not large enough to represent Chinese run-on sentences translation. Future research on run-on sentences is a long way off, and more translators' translations of running sentences need to be collected to explore the translation strategies of run-on sentences.

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