

# English Translation Strategies for Chinese Run-on Sentence: A Contrastive Linguistic Perspective

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Chinese run-on sentence is a typical sentence structure in the Chinese language, characterized by loose form but deep meaning, emphasis on implicit cohesion, and zero anaphora, which pose challenges in the process of English translation. In light of this, this research explores translation strategies for Chinese run-on sentence from a contrastive linguistic perspective. The study reveals that in the process of English translation, translators, considering the differences between Chinese and Western thinking patterns, make the implicit explicit, shift subject-object awareness, and transform “bamboo-shaped structure” into “tree-shaped structure”.

*Keywords:* contrastive linguistics, Chinese run-on sentence, translation strategy

## Introduction

Lv (1979, p. 23) pointed out, “A Chinese run-on sentence consists of one clause following another, with many points where it can be interrupted or connected”. Scholars have made significant strides in studying the definition, classification, and semantics of run-on sentence. However, much of this research has primarily focused on ontological research, and there has been limited exploration regarding English translation strategies for Chinese run-on sentence. This paper intends to adopt a contrastive linguistic perspective to investigate strategies and approaches for translating Chinese run-on sentence into English, focusing on aspects, such as explicitization, subject-object awareness, and the transformation from a bamboo-shaped structure to a tree-shaped structure. The aim is to provide fresh insights into the English translation of Chinese run-on sentence.

## Chinese Run-on Sentence

According to Wang and Zhao,

A Chinese run-on sentence is a kind of complex sentence composed of multiple sentence segments, with loose inter-segmental structure, implicit conjunctive word, often containing multiple subjects, hidden from time to time, requiring cross-segmental reference from time to time, and frequent co-occurrences of phrases and clauses within the run-on sentence. (Wang & Zhao, 2017, p. 35)

As one of the more unique sentence types in Chinese, run-on sentences can largely reflect the essence of Chinese (Wang & Zhao, 2017, p. 35), i.e., Chinese has spatial and English has temporal qualities. Wang points out that the temporal worldview is the key to grasping the English hypotaxis, object consciousness, individual thought, abstract thought, and static characteristics, while the spatial worldview is the key to grasping the Chinese

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parataxis, subject consciousness, holistic thought, figurative thought, and dynamic characteristics (Wang, 2019, p. 63).

## **Chinese-English Sentence Structure Differences**

### **Bamboo-Shaped Structure**

Chinese sentence construction is influenced by the enlightened way of thinking of the Chinese people. According to Lian (2010), Chinese sentences are organized in the order of grammatical units according to the flow of thought, which belongs to the “bamboo structure”. The subject-predicate structure of Chinese is complex and varied, and the subject can be implicit or explicit; the sentence can have no subject, and the subject can be omitted or changed and implied (Lian, 2010, p. 58). It can be seen that the sentence structure of Chinese is more flexible and changeable. From word, sentence, to text, it all reflects the characteristics of Chinese language, emphasizing the meaning of sentences and paying attention to psychological understanding rather than formal structure. Ancient Chinese had no punctuation, which requires readers to understand the semantic and logical relationship between sentences according to the specific context and sense of language, reflecting the philosophical thinking of “All Are for Myself”. Therefore, in the Chinese run-on sentences, the Chinese parataxis is especially obvious, and the phenomenon of the subject being “hidden” is very common. For instance, the old poem “鸡声茅店月，人迹板桥霜” adopts the technique of juxtaposition of images (similar to the montage technique in the movie), and without the help of any conjunction, the combination of nouns alone constitutes a very spatial and desolate picture of the wanderer who is on his way in the early morning. The phenomenon of juxtaposition in Chinese can be clearly reflected from word construction to sentence construction and even text (Wang, 2019; Wu, 2023), such as the idiom “春花秋月”, “春花”, and “秋月” have similarities, and the two should be in the longitudinal convergence axis of the choice, but are pulled to the combination axis juxtaposition (Wu, 2023, p. 26). The reason is that the overall semantic meaning of “春花秋月” is not “春花” and “秋月”, but refers to “the beautiful scenery of spring” and “autumn days”, which obviously breaks through the restriction of adjacent combination, and the semantic has unity, which is the manifestation of the spatial aggregation characteristics generated by the juxtaposition structure (Wu, 2023, p. 26).

### **Tree-Shaped Structure**

Influenced by Western rational thinking, the semantic and syntactic forms of English sentences are closely connected, belonging to the “tree structure” (Lian, 2010). Influenced by Aristotle’s strict logical thinking, English subject-predicate structure is rigorous, logical subject and predicate are indispensable, and the two are harmonized in the formal structure to form the core of the sentence, which is the outline, gathering all kinds of relational networks, and the sentence is in the form of “aggregation” (Lian, 2010, pp. 51-52). Written English is often long and cumbersome, clauses can be stacked on top of each other, and each component of the sentence is linked by flexible and rich means of expressing relations and connections, and the whole sentence pays attention to explicit connection, formalization, and unification of meaning with form, just like a big tree with many branches and leaves.

In a word, Chinese run-on sentences mostly show parallel juxtaposition structure, and the primary-secondary relationship is not obvious, which belongs to scatter perspective, while the English compound sentence presents the hierarchical nested structure, has the strict division of principle sentence and subordinate clause, and belongs to the focus perspective (Wu, 2023, p. 27).

## An Analysis of English Translation Strategies for Chinese Running Sentences

### Explicitation

Shuttleworth and Cowie (2014) believed that explicitation is the translation which presents the potential information of the original text in a more intuitive form, and the translator adds explanatory phrases or uses conjunctive words, etc., in order to enhance the logic and readability of the translation. Running sentences play an important role in text construction. Halliday (1985, p. 31) hold that textual function, in general, is manifested through theme and rheme, known and new information and cohesion. Therefore, when translating into English, we can take explicitation as a macro strategy and talk about the translation methods or techniques of English translation of run-on sentences in terms of theme and rheme, known and new information and cohesion, and so on.

Since the subject is often hidden in run-on sentences, the hidden personal pronouns and other components need to be made visible in English translation for the sake of linguistic form. According to Xu (2002, p. 12), “finding out the nominative constituents with zero-form  $\emptyset$  position in the sentence is the fundamental problem of confirming clause cohesion and recognizing the structural hierarchy of run-on sentences”. Therefore, the key to clarifying the syntactic structure and semantic-logical relations of run-on sentences is to make the subject explicit.

#### Example 1:

①平时她不许孩子们乱走动, ②拔一株草, ③翻一块石头, ④就说是顽皮, ⑤要去告诉母亲去。(Zhang, 2007, p. 299)

She would not let the children get up to mischief. If they pulled up a weed or turned over a stone, she would say they were naughty and threaten to tell their mother.

The sentence contains two subjects, which is a multi-subject sentence. In Example 1, the personal pronoun “she” refers to “阿长” in the above text, which is known information; the predicate verb “不许” leads to the part of the statement, which is new information. In Sentences (2), (3), (4), and (5), the subject is invisible, and in English translation, in order to promote the coherence of the discourse, it is necessary to make the logical subject visible; therefore, the translator uses the pronoun “they” to make the subject “孩子们” in Sentences (2) and (3) visible. The phrase “ $\phi$ 就说 $\phi$ 是顽皮” is translated as “she (*theme*)/would say (*rheme*) they (*theme*)/were naughty (*rheme*)” with the help of “she” and “they” respectively”, reflecting the fact that English is a subject-dominant language.

### Transformation of the Subject and Object Consciousness

English-Chinese language differences ultimately reflect the differences in the national cultures and ways of thinking of the language users. In multi-subject run-on sentences, the subject is often hidden, and sometimes it needs to be recognized across the sentence, so it is not suitable to drive directly down the sentence in English translation; otherwise it will affect the coherence of the discourse. When translating from English, out of the need to make sentences into chapters or when the active form is not easy to express, the translator needs to switch between Chinese and English thinking and cognitive modes, i.e., the subjective thinking is converted into the object thinking, which can be used to conceal the subject of the action, turn the active relationship into the active-object relationship, and avoid the repeated switching of different subjects to a certain extent, which is conducive to the advancement of discourse coherence.

#### Example 2:

和我相反的是我的小兄弟, ①他那时大概十岁内外罢, ②多病, ③瘦得不堪, ④然而最喜欢风筝,

⑤自己买不起, ⑥我又不许放, ⑦他只得张着小嘴, ⑧呆看着空中出神, ⑨有时至于小半日。(Liu, 2010, p. 79)

My younger brother, however, about ten years of age then, weak and thin, frequently troubled with sickness, was crazy about kites. Unable to afford it and *deprived of the access to it by this elder brother of his*, he would stand there, his tiny mouth opens in a gape, watching upward, sometimes for hours running. (Liu, 2010, p. 81)

The sentence contains two subjects, “I” and “he”, and the two characters appear alternately, which belongs to multi-subject running sentences. In Sentences (2), (3), (4), (5), (8), and (9), there is a zero form, the logical subject of these sentences is “he”, and only the subject of Sentence (6) is “I”, in which case the translator needs to consider the translation of Sentence (6), and it is worth noting that the Chinese language uses the active form more often than the passive form. The sentence “我又不许放” reflects the influence of the subject thought. In order to avoid a sudden change of subject in the English translation, the translator, instead of treating it as “I don’t allow him to fly it”, uses a semantically similar word but with the opposite agent-recipient relation, “deprived of the access to it by this elder brother of his”, i.e. converting the Chinese active sentence into the English passive sentence. This phenomenon reflects the difference between Chinese and Western ways of thinking: The Chinese active sentence is the embodiment of the subjective consciousness of “All Are for Myself”, while the English passive sentence is a manifestation of the object consciousness that “Subject-Object Dichotomy”. It is because of the translator’s skillful handling, avoiding the change of subject, that the whole sentence structure is more compact.

### **Build a Tree Structure—With a Clear Hierarchy of Main and Subordinate Components**

The Chinese flowing sentence is juxtaposed between the segments of each sentence like bamboo joints, which can be more or less, just like flowing water, and the point of view has fluidity. English takes the main sentence (subject-predicate core structure) as an overall plan, similar to a trunk, and the rest of the components must be spread around the center of the main sentence, which is the branch of the tree, and with the help of various connecting means (such as relative words, conjunctive words, prepositions, non-predicate verbs, etc.), it becomes a “towering tree” with lush leaves.

Example 3:

①登临华山, ②立于下棋亭上, ③喝干了那一壶“西凤”, ④听谁个粗野的汉子狼一般地吼着秦腔, ⑤我就觉得棋亭里还坐着赵匡胤和那个陈抟…… (Liu, 2010, p. 225)

I went up to Mt. Huashan and stood in the Chess Pavilion. Drinking up a bottle of Xifeng to the wild howling of Qin opera by some rough fellow, I had the feeling that Zhao Kuangyin, the Founding Emperor of the Song Dynasty, was sitting in the pavilion, playing chess with Chen Tuan, the ancient Taoist hermit. (Liu, 2010, p. 226)

“For general multi topic run-on sentences, translators can follow the principle of ‘core semantics’, select core topics from multiple topics, match corresponding core verbs, and organize the sentence ‘aorta’ to construct English core sentences” (Wu, 2023, p. 24). According to Wang and Zhao’s (2017) categorization of Chinese run-on sentences, Example 3 belongs to a single-subject run-on sentence, and the subject is not apparent at the beginning and appears at the end of the sentence. There is no subject in the first four segments, and the subject “I” appears in the last segment. Since the sentence segments that constitute a run-on sentence may not have the structure of “subject + predicate” at the same time, the structural relationship between the sentence segments is loose and focuses on implicit coherence. On the other hand, English complex sentences are centered on the “subject-predicate” structure, and there is a distinction between the subject and the subordinate, which is characterized by a strong temporal linearity (Wang, 2019), and if there are more than one verb, the predicative

verb of the main clause is a core reference point in the temporal linearity sequence, and it is marked with a temporal marker in order to maintain consistency with the subject-predicative structure and form a tense (Wang, 2019). In view of the language differences between Chinese and English, the translation combines Sentences (1) and (2), adds the action emitter, i.e., the subject “I”, combines Sentences (3) and (4), treats them as participial phrases as accompanying gerunds, treats the predicate verb “喝” as a participial phrase, and converts “听” into the preposition “to” to show that the two actions happen almost at the same time. Sentence (5) is processed into a main-subordinate compound sentence, with feeling as the antecedent to lead the homonym clause, which makes the main and subordinate clauses clearly distinguishable, and highlights the hierarchy of the sentence.

### Conclusion

According to Humboldt, “Language is a historical deposit of the nation’s thought that reflects the nation’s mode of thought in observing, perceiving, and understanding the world” (Wang, 2019, p. 151). Chinese run-on sentence reflects the characteristics of Chinese, such as parataxis, spatiality, and iconicity of order, which is the mapping of the Chinese cognitive psychology of emphasizing the subject’s consciousness on the language form. In view of this, translators should give full consideration to the differences between Chinese and English languages, Chinese and Western ways of thinking, cognitive habits, and culture. Translators should transform implicit into explicit and pay attention to the transformation of subject-object consciousness in accordance with the characteristics of English, which emphasize formation, subject-predicate, and grammar, so as to transform Chinese “bamboo” structure into English “tree” structure and juxtaposition sentence into English compound sentence. There are still some shortcomings in this study, which has not exhausted the translation strategies of run-on sentences, but only discusses the translation strategies of run-on sentences from several aspects in order to provide some references for the translation of Chinese run-on sentences.

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