

# Review of Research on English Translation of Chinese Running Sentences

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In order to convey complete meanings, there is a phenomenon in Chinese of using multiple running sentences. Xu Jingning (2023, p. 66) states, "In communication, a complete expression of meaning often requires more than one clause, which is common in human languages." Domestic research on running sentences includes discussions on defining the concept and structural features of running sentences, sentence properties, sentence pattern classifications and their criteria, as well as issues related to translating running sentences into English. This article primarily focuses on scholarly research into the English translation of running sentences in China, highlighting recent achievements and identifying existing issues in the study of running sentence translation. However, by reviewing literature on the translation of running sentences, it is found that current research in the academic community on non-core running sentences is limited. Therefore, this paper proposes relevant strategies to address this issue.

*Keywords:* Chinese running sentences, topics, English-Chinese translation

## Introduction

Understanding running sentences is a prerequisite for translating them. Running sentences are very common in Chinese and can be said to be a unique feature of the language. Lu Shuxiang (1979) first proposed the concept of "running sentences." He believed, "Using clauses rather than sentences as the basic unit is more suitable for Chinese, because there are many running sentences in spoken Chinese, where one clause follows another, and many places allow for both breaks and connections. Compare several different editions of an old novel, often with one using periods and another using commas, or one using commas and another using periods." Since then, more and more scholars have joined the study of running sentences. By reviewing relevant literature, this paper attempts to summarize the following issues: (1) the subjectivity of translators when translating running sentences into English; (2) topic selection when translating running sentences into English; (3) the selection and translation of core sentences when translating running sentences into English.

### **Translator Subjectivity in the Translation of Chinese Topic-Comment Sentences into English**

Each translator has their own unique style and perspective, which is also evident in the translation of topic-comment sentences. Indeed, whether it's the choice of topics during English translation or the selection between core and non-core sentences, all reflect the translator's subjectivity. There has been limited research in China on the translator's subjectivity during the translation of topic-comment sentences. Weng Yiming and Gao Feng (2021, p. 48) suggest, "The major difference between Chinese topic-comment sentences and English complex sentences lies in that topic-comment sentences emphasize semantic unity; clauses do not have a clear hierarchy, and the semantic relations between clauses are implicit and not reflected in form, expressing objectivity and conciseness. English is a form-focused language where clauses within complex sentences have a hierarchy, and the semantic relations between clauses are explicit and reflected in form."

### **Topic Selection in Translating Chinese Running Sentences into English**

The so-called topic refers to the subject in a running sentence. When translating sentences, undoubtedly, it is necessary to select a good topic, analyze and understand around the topic, and translate the sentence smoothly and naturally. Zhao Chaoyong and Wang Wenbin (2023, p. 19) suggest that "in Chinese running sentences, there is also a type of interconnected running sentences, although consisting of multiple clauses, strictly speaking, these clauses share a single subject. When translated into English, it is necessary to choose one of these clauses as the core subject-verb structure, while the remaining clauses are handled as non-predicate forms; if there are many clauses, then two or more core subjects are chosen, dividing the interconnected running sentence into multiple sentences." In other words, the primary task in translating Chinese running sentences into English is to determine the subject and predicate, that is, to establish the core sentence. Once the subject and sentence structure are determined, the English translation naturally falls into place. Therefore, when translating, how should the subject be selected appropriately? In response to this question, Weng Yiming and Zhang Shuiying propose strategies for selecting subjects in Chinese running sentences, involving several scenarios: (1) choosing a subject identical to the original text's subject; (2) translating with a subject different from the original text's subject; (3) when the original text lacks a subject, adding one in the English translation. In the first scenario, if the subjects of the clauses within the running sentence are different, the translator can choose the subject based on the context to ensure the accuracy and rationality of the translation. Regarding the second scenario, Weng Yiming and Zhang Shuiying (2023, p. 92) suggest that "while directly converting the subject of the Chinese original into the subject of the English translation is the simplest and most convenient, due to differences between English and Chinese language types and between Western and Chinese modes of thinking, the subjects in the clauses of Chinese running sentences do not always correspond directly to English." Therefore, according to Weng et al., depending on the context of the original text, the topic, object, attributive, pronoun, or nominalized subject can be chosen, instead. As for the third scenario, Weng Yiming and Zhang Shuiying (2023, p. 94) argue that "because Chinese often does not emphasize the integrity of subject-predicate structures, in many cases, Chinese sentences can omit subjects at will or may not require any subject at all. Subject omission and sentences without subjects are common expressions in Chinese, which highlight the advantages of Chinese writing. Regarding English translation, translators should analyze the logical relationships between various components of the original text

and appropriately handle phenomena such as subject omission and sentences without subjects according to English syntax rules, sometimes adding subjects based on different contexts and expressive needs.” Since the expression order and structure of English sentences differ from those of Chinese sentences, the original subject cannot directly serve as the subject of the translation. Furthermore, different translators have different interpretations regarding subject selection. The author suggests that translators should consider the entire sentence, select an appropriate subject, and construct the sentence structure well. When encountering common Chinese running sentences without subjects, translators should add suitable translated subjects based on the meaning and context of the sentence to achieve accurate expression of sentence meaning and smoothness in the translated sentence. This translation aims to capture the essence and details of the original text while ensuring clarity and coherence in English.

### **Selection and Translation of Core Sentences in Translating Chinese Colloquial Sentences into English**

Typically, a colloquial Chinese sentence contains substantial information, where speakers aim to express complete thoughts in a single sentence, ending with a period or other punctuation marks. Such sentences may lack explicit subjects, objects, and coordinating conjunctions. In contrast, English often employs complex sentences with subordinate clauses, akin to a structure comprising a core sentence and various non-core sentences. Therefore, selecting and translating the core sentence from Chinese colloquial speech into English is pivotal. In recent years, scholars have offered various insights into this area for reference and learning. Wu Juyan explores single-topic and multi-topic colloquial sentences, proposing several methods for constructing English core sentences: “Single-topic colloquial sentences: apply the principle of ‘topic combined with core verb’ to form the English core sentence; multi-topic colloquial sentences: use the ‘core semantic’ principle to create the English core sentence; analyze the English core sentence through the ‘A, B, + C...’ principle, resembling parallelism, for multi-topic colloquial sentences” (Wu, 2023, p. 30). Here, the “A, B, + C...” principle, defined by Wu Juyan (2023, p. 30), involves structuring parts of multi-topic colloquial sentences in a rhythmic and cohesive manner, similar to parallelism, to demonstrate the tight syntactic cohesion in English. Wu Juyan (2023) suggests that translators should particularly focus on using explicit English grammatical and lexical devices such as conjunctions, prepositions, non-finite verb structures, and clauses to ensure that non-core elements surround and support the core sentence, achieving a hierarchical structure in English from the juxtapositional structure in Chinese. Hu Ping and Liu Yanxia (2021) approach the translation of colloquial sentences from the perspectives of “focus” and “scattered points,” explaining how to translate colloquial sentences into English. Shen Xiaolong (1991) originally introduced the concepts of “focus” and “scattered points” into the study of cultural linguistics, combining language with cultural psychology. Connections between individual clauses in Chinese colloquial sentences generally exhibit logical or spatial relationships. When translating into English, sentences should first be logically divided, with the most crucial sentence serving as the core. Predominantly, the predicate verb functions as the main clause, with other clauses expressed as adverbial modifiers around it. Additionally, connections such as conjunctions can be added to the translation to align with the expressive forms of English sentences.

## Conclusion

From the above summary, it can be seen that the exploration of translating Chinese copula sentences into English is a gradual process. It mainly includes: Firstly, exploring the subjectivity of translators in translating copula sentences. Translators have their own unique styles and understandings of sentences. Their subjectivity is fully demonstrated in the translation of copula sentences, including the choice of topic and core sentence, as well as which sentences are non-core. Secondly, how to choose appropriate topics when translating copula sentences into English. Due to cultural differences, English and Chinese sentences have different expression orders and structures. Therefore, translators may have different subjects from the original text, and different translators may choose different subjects. Therefore, translators should consider the entire sentence, link it to the context, select an appropriate subject, and construct a reasonable sentence structure. Especially when translating copula sentences without subjects in Chinese, translators can add appropriate subjects based on the meaning and context to express sentences clearly and make them easy for readers to understand. Thirdly, selecting the appropriate core sentence and translating it when translating copula sentences into English. Zhao Chaoyong and Wang Wenbin (2023) believe that the reason why English long sentences exhibit cohesion and continuity lies in the subject-predicate structure. Therefore, the primary step in translating Chinese copula sentences into English is to determine the sentence's main structure. Scholars Hu Ping and Liu Yanxia focus on "focus" and "scatter" to analyze how to translate copula sentences into English. Scholar Wu Juyan divides them into single-topic copula sentences and multi-topic copula sentences, proposing several methods for constructing English core sentences. Of course, there are still many aspects of translating copula sentences into English that deserve further exploration in academia. Further efforts are needed in research and practice to explore how to translate copula sentences into English effectively.

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