



The Contrastive Analysis of the Thinking Modes of Chinese and English --Taking the Chinese Original Text and English Version of *Mr. About-the-same* for Example

Tian Dong¹, Peiyu Wang^{1*}

¹Department of English, School of Foreign Languages, North China Electric Power University, Baoding, Hebei, China

*Corresponding Author
Peiyu Wang

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Abstract: This paper aims at solving the problem that translators cannot choose proper techniques in actual work by analyzing the thinking modes of Chinese and English behind many techniques of translation. The author analyzes the thinking modes of Chinese and English in the Chinese original text and English version of *Mr. About-the-same* from three aspects: stativeness and dynamicity, overtness and covertness, rigidity and flexibility proposed in *Contrastive Linguistics between Chinese and English*. Through the analysis of this paper, the reasons of choosing a certain technique of translation will be more obvious, so it is easier for translators to choose an appropriate technique in actual work. It is concluded that the differences between Chinese and English thinking modes are important for choosing translating techniques.

Keywords: Chinese thinking modes, English thinking modes, translation, translation techniques.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Since the distinction between "the unity of man and nature" and "the dichotomy of man and nature", scholars have never stopped researching thinking modes. In the early days, many scholars did some research on thinking modes.

Dainian Zhang (1991) compared Chinese thinking modes with those of the West drawing a conclusion that Chinese thinking patterns are holistic, synthetic, intuitional, imagery and feminine and that Western thinking patterns are partial, analytic, rational and masculine. Later, Shuneng Lian (2010) combined thinking modes with language and put forward ten contrastive aspects of Chinese and English thinking modes. Recently, more and more scholars have begun to explore the differences in thinking modes from the perspective of metaphor. Zhicheng Liu (2019) mentioned in his article that

people have different ways of constructing cognition of the external world, which also reflects the differences in thinking modes.

To sum up, the study of thinking modes is still a hot topic at present and more and more scholars try to study thinking modes from different perspectives. The author also captures this hot issue and mainly analyzes the differences between Chinese and English modes of thinking in this paper. Slightly different from previous studies, the author emphasizes the importance of understanding the differences between Chinese and English modes of thinking in English-Chinese translation, aiming to give translators some guidance in actual translation work.

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2. LITERATURE REVIEW

As to analyzing thinking modes, there are a lot of dimensions proposed from different perspectives, such as Karl Pribram (1950), Suzuki Teitaro Daisetz and Erich Fromm (1965), Shuneng Lian (2011), Guangming Zhang (2001) and so on.

Dezhang Chen (2011) distinguishes the differences between Chinese and English which can cause difficulties for translation practice, making a contrastive study between Chinese and English from five perspectives: abstraction vs. concretion, stativeness vs. dynamicity, overtness vs. covertness, rigidity vs. flexibility, objectivity vs. subjectivity. Among these thinking patterns, stativeness vs. dynamicity emphasizes that there are more verbs in Chinese than in English and verbs in Chinese tend to take more dynamicity. Overtness vs. covertness emphasizes that grammatical markers are more overt in English than in Chinese. Rigidity vs. flexibility emphasizes that English grammar rules are more rigid than those of Chinese. Vocabulary, semantic, syntactic and pragmatic perspectives are all involved in this book, so the dimensions to analyze thinking modes in this book are chosen as the standard of the following analysis.

3. ANALYSIS OF THE DIFFERENCES OF THINKING MODES BETWEEN THE CHINESE ORIGINAL TEXT AND ENGLISH VERSION

Mr. About-the-same is a biographical fable written by Shi Hu in 1919, one of China's most famous writers. It is a masterpiece with the characteristics of that time. *Mr. About-the-same* is written entirely in vernacular Chinese, which has the characteristics of Chinese language. The English version is produced by Peiji Zhang, a famous translator in China, whose translated work tends to be more like native English. So comparing the differences in thinking modes between the English version and the original text will be more significant.

3.1 Stativeness and Dynamicity

The first difference of thinking modes between Chinese and English is that Chinese thinking modes tend to be more dynamic, while English thinking modes tend to be more stative. The following analysis will be illustrated from three aspects of using verbs, inflections of verbs, classifications of verbs and functions of verbs in Chinese and English.

3.1.1. Inflections of Verbs

Verbs in English have many kinds of inflections. However, there is no verb inflection in Chinese. Therefore, the degree of dynamicity of Chinese is higher than that of English. Examples are analyzed below.

Example 1.你一定见过他，一定听别人提起过他。
(P15)

You must have seen or heard about this person.
(P17)

In the Chinese article, the verb 见 represents the action of the actor and the word 过 shows that the action has been completed and caused some result. But in the English version the verb *see* is in its present perfect tense form *seen*, plus the word *have*, emphasizing the result of the action. Therefore the degree of the dynamicity of the verb *see* is weakened by the inflection because it emphasizes the result besides the action itself and becomes less dynamic than the verb 见 in the Chinese article.

Example 2.他小的时候，他妈叫他去买红糖，他买糖回来了，他买了白糖回来。(P15)

One day, when he was a child, his mother sent him out to buy her some brown sugar, but he returned with some white sugar.(P17)

In the second example, the Chinese verb 叫 is the action of the actor and does not have any inflection. But in the English version the Chinese verb 叫 is translated into *sent*, which reveals the past tense besides the action. While in the Chinese original text, the past tense is shown by the temporal adverbial 他小的时候 instead of the inflection of the verb. Because of the inflection of the verb in the English version, a feeling of distance of time is aroused in readers' heart. Therefore the dynamicity of the verb *sent* is less intense than that of the Chinese verb 叫. In conclusion, without inflection of verbs in Chinese different tenses are expressed by some words indicating tenses such as 过 or by temporal adverbials such as 他小的时候 mentioned above.

3.1.2. Classification of Verbs

Both English verbs and Chinese verbs can be classified into "action verbs" and "stative verbs". The number of stative verbs in English is more than that of Chinese. Examples are analyzed below.

Example 3.他姓差，名不多，是各省各县各村人氏。(P15)

His surname is Cha and his given name, Buduo, which altogether mean "About the Same". He is a native of every province, every county and every village in this country.(P17)

The action verbs 姓 and 名 in the Chinese article are replaced by two nouns and a stative verb *is* in English. Although these two expressions have similar meanings, the dynamicity revealed by the

action verbs 姓 and 名 cannot be replaced by the stative verb *is*. We can also see that to convey the same meaning Chinese tend to use more action verbs than English, which causes more dynamicity of Chinese than that of English.

Example 4. 千字比十字只多一小撇, 不是差不多吗? (P15)

The character 千 differs from 十 in merely having one additional short stroke. Aren't they about the same?(P18)

In the Chinese article, there are two verbs 比 and 多, which are both action verbs in Chinese. But the verb 比 is not translated and 多 is translated into *one additional*. This undoubtedly lessens the dynamicity of the original Chinese text. What's more, the translator chooses free translation in his work and adds another phrase *differs from* to express the same meaning as the Chinese. It is worth noting that *differ* in English is a stative verb rather than an action verb. From the instances before we can see that there tends to be action verbs in Chinese and that these corresponding parts tend to be replaced by stative verbs and nouns in English. Because of the different use of the classification of verbs in both languages, Chinese is more dynamic than English.

3.1.3 Functions of Verbs

In English words' function corresponds to their part of speech in the sentence. Verbs can only be used as the predicate in English and there is only one predicate in one sentence. But this is not the same in Chinese. Examples are analyzed in detail.

Example 5. 有一天, 他忽然得了急病, 赶快叫家人去请东街的汪医生。(P16)

One day he suddenly fell ill and immediately told one of his family to fetch Dr. Wāng of East Street.(P18)

What can be seen in the Chinese sentence above is that "multiverbal form" is frequently used in Chinese, such as 叫家人去请东街的汪医生. Here 去请东街的汪医生 is the complement of 家人, 请东街的汪医生 is the object of 去 and there is no change in the verb 去 and 请. While in the English version, this part is translated into "told one of his family to fetch Dr. Wāng of East Street", 去 is translated into "to" and 请 is translated into "to fetch" as they are not the predicates of the sentence. After such transformation, the dynamicity of the Chinese verbs is weakened in the English version because of one-predicate principle in English sentence. Another example is analyzed.

Example 6. 他白瞪着眼, 望着远远的火车上的煤烟, 摇摇头道...他一面说, 一面慢慢地走回家, 心里

总是不明白为什么火车不能等他两分钟。(P15-P16)

He stood staring helplessly at the smoke belching from the diminishing train, and shook his head... He walked home slowly while talking to himself and kept puzzling over why the train hadn't waited for him another two minutes.(P18)

In example 6, there are more than one verbs in one Chinese sentence like 瞪,望,摇摇头,说,走,不明白,等. Among these verbs, 瞪,望,摇摇头,说,走,不明白 all play the role as a predicate in the sentence. But only 摇摇头 and 走 are translated into predicates and others are expressed as "staring", "talking", "kept puzzling" instead of the original forms of themselves. Therefore the dynamicity of these verbs was lessened. Another verb different from these verbs in the Chinese sentence is 等. It is the object of the verb 不能 with 他两分钟. In the English version, the verb 不能 is replaced by the word not, that is, it is not translated into the corresponding verb in English. According to the examples above, we can see that there can be more than one predicate in a Chinese sentence and verbs have other functions apart from predicate. However, it is not true in English. So in English, many Chinese verbs are translated into nouns, gerund form or other forms, which certainly weakens the dynamicity of the verbs themselves.

3.2. Overtness and Covertness

Grammatical markers are more frequently used in English than in Chinese. So in this way, Chinese is not so overt as English. The covertness and overtness between Chinese and English will be discussed from three aspects: the existence of articles, the marker of plural and the expression of passive voice.

3.2.1 The Existence of Articles

In English, there are two kinds of articles: indefinite article "a/an" and definite article "the". But there is no article in Chinese. Examples are analyzed below.

Example 7. 后来他在一个钱铺里作伙计。(P15)

Later Mr. Cha Buduo served as an assistant at a money shop.(P17)

In the example above, the article "an" in the English version expresses the meaning that Mr. Cha Buduo is just an ordinary assistant in the money shop, but there is no marker corresponding to "an" in the Chinese version. But the indefinite reference can also be inferred from the context. Another example is analyzed below.

Example 8. 他从容从容地走到火车站, 迟了两分钟, 火车已经开走了。(P15)

But he arrived at the railway station unhurriedly only to find the train already gone, because he was two minutes late.(P18)

In the Chinese article, there is no article before the noun 火车站, but there is an article *the* meaning definite before *railway station*. That is, the station is known by all in the country and is the one that Mr. Cha Buduo had arrived at. But the definite reference can also be inferred from the context in the Chinese article. Without an article, we can still get the definite reference in the Chinese text conveyed by the article *the* in the English version.

3.2.2 Marker of the Plural

English uses suffix “-s/-es” to mark the plural form of countable nouns. But in Chinese there is no such a typical morpheme to be the marker of plural.

Example 9. 他死后, 大家都称赞差不多先生样样事情看得破, 想得通。(P16)

After Mr. Cha Buduo's death, people all praised him for his way of seeing through things and his philosophical approach to life.(P18)

The Chinese word 事情 expresses plural meaning not by the character 们 but through the attributive 样样. But in the English version, there is “s” at the end of the word *thing* to mark the plural form.

Example 10. 然而中国从此成为一个懒人国了。(P16)

But lo, China will hence be a nation of *lazybones*.(P18)

It is obviously that there is more than one 懒人 in the nation. But in the Chinese article, there is no plural marker attached to 懒人 to reveal it. In the English version, *lazybones* is used to mark the plural form. Through the comparison, markers of the plural is the requirement of English overt grammatical rules, but these markers need not be revealed in Chinese.

3.2.3 The Expression of the Passive Voice

Example 11. 掌柜的生气了, 常常骂他。(P15)

The shop owner was infuriated and often took him to task. (P17)

In the Chinese sentence above, the relation between 掌柜的 and 生气 is not obvious. It looks like an active voice, and 掌柜的 is the agent of the action 生气. But in fact he is displeased by Mr. Chu Buduo, that is, it is actually a passive voice. In the English version this relation is revealed by the expression “was infuriated” which indicates the

verb-object relation between *shop owner* and *infuriate*.

Example 12. 差不多先生病在床上, 知道寻错了人。(P16)

Mr. Cha Buduo, lying on his sickbed, knew that a wrong person had been brought home.(P18)

In the Chinese sentence above, 知道寻错了人 is a sentence in the active voice. However, this sentence is translated into a passive sentence, which emphasizes more on the objective result of the action. What we can see from this example is that passive voice tend to be more used in English than in Chinese.

3.3 Rigidity and Flexibility

English has a set of strict grammatical rules. But there are not so many rules regulating the expression in Chinese. Therefore, Chinese is more flexible than English. Analysis will be conducted from four aspects next.

3.3.1 Subject

Every English sentence has a subject, which is a noun, a pronoun, a noun phrase or a noun clause. But in Chinese there may be no subject in a sentence, and the part seen as a subject is hard to category. For example,

Example 13. 提起此人, 人人皆晓, 处处闻名。(Zhang Peiji15)

The name of this person is a household word all over the country. (Zhang 17)

In the Chinese article, the verb 提起 and 闻名 don't have a subject. In the English version there is only one subject in the sentence. Facing the condition that some verbs do not have subjects in Chinese the translator takes the Chinese sentence as a whole, omits unimportant Chinese verbs and translates it into a one-predicate English sentence. What can be concluded is that subject is not the indispensable part in Chinese sentences but having a subject or having only a subject is rigid in English.

Example 14. 只好明天再走了, 今天走同明天走, 也差不多。(P15)

Well, all I can do is leave tomorrow. After all, today and tomorrow are about the same.(P18)

In the Chinese article, 今天走 and 明天走 are the subjects of 也差不多 and they are verb phrases. But in the English version, they are translated into two nouns, *today* and *tomorrow*, and the verb 走 is deleted. Based on the differences of the subject between Chinese and English, we can see that Chinese is more flexible than English.

3.3.2 Word Order

Word order is fixed in English. But word order in Chinese is not so important as that in English. There is one example in the article.

Example 15.你知道中国最有名的人是谁? (P15)

Do you know who is the most well-known person in China? (P17)

The Chinese sentence can be changed into 你知道谁是中国最有名的人 or 谁是中国最有名的人你知道吗. Although the word order changes, the meaning of the sentence doesn't change and it is grammatically acceptable. But in the English sentence, except the phrase "in China", the place of other parts cannot be changed, otherwise the sentence is not right grammatically, such as Do you know the most well-known person in China is who. There is another example below.

Example 16. 他一面说, 一面慢慢地走回家, 心里总是不明白为什么火车不肯等他两分钟。(P16)

He walked home slowly while talking to himself and kept puzzling over why the train hadn't waited for another two minutes. (P18)

In this example, 为什么火车不肯等他两分钟 can be changed into 火车为什么不肯等他两分钟 without changing the meaning. But the order in the English version is fixed and the clause cannot be translated into *the train why hadn't waited for another two minutes*, which is not grammatically acceptable. So word order in English is more restricted by grammatical rules than in Chinese.

3.3.3 Sentence

In English, a sentence must obey more rigid grammatical rules than those of Chinese. For example,

Example 17.他从从容容地走到火车站, 迟了两分钟, 火车已经开走了。(P15)

But he arrived at the railway station unhurriedly only to find the train already gone, because he was two minutes late.(P18)

In the 17th example, there are three verbs, 走, 迟 and 开走, in the Chinese sentence, but the relation between the three actions is not revealed, whereas in the English sentence, the relation between the three actions is clear: *arrived at* is the action of the actor, Mr. About-the-same, *gone* is the result of the action and *was two minutes late* is the reason of the result. If the sentence is translated into "he arrived at the railway station unhurriedly, two minutes late, the train had already gone", it is a wrong sentence from the grammatical perspective.

From logical perspective, the connection between the three verbs is not obvious. So the rules regulating a sentence in English are more rigid than in Chinese.

Example 18. 那家人急急忙忙地跑去, 一时寻不着东街的汪大夫, 却把西街牛医王大夫请来了。(P16)

The latter went in a hurry, but couldn't find the physician on East Street. So he fetched instead Veterinarian Wáng of West Street.(P18)

There are three sentences in the Chinese example, 那家人急急忙忙地跑去, 一时寻不着东街的汪大夫 and 却把西街牛医王大夫请来了, which are connected with commas, but there is no clues revealing the relation between the three sentences and no connections between them. However, in the English version there are *but* and *so* indicating the relation between the three sentences and these two conjunctions are necessary because the three sentences cannot be juxtaposed without connection in English. Therefore, the use of conjunction is more rigid in English than in Chinese to realize the coherence of a sentence.

4. CONCLUSION

There are always differences between two languages, but what is more important is the thinking modes behind these two languages. Among all differences between Chinese and English thinking modes, three differences have been chosen in the current study, because these differences may cause difficulties in translation. So after the analysis of the differences, some suggestions are given for a better translation.

1. Verbs are dominant in Chinese and nouns are dominant in English, so the translator should pay more attention to the transformation between nouns and verbs.
2. Chinese is a covert language because of covertness in Chinese culture, so the unrevealed markers and covert relations in Chinese should be overtly revealed in the English version, such as the plural form, the passive voice and the coherence between sentences.
3. When translating from Chinese to English, translators do not just pay attention to the form of the sentence. More attention should be paid to the connection and the grammatically correction of the sentence.

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