

# Comparison of Chinese LBs and English RBs

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As English and Chinese belong to different language families, the left and right branching structures in the two languages are both similar and different. Generally speaking, Chinese has a predominance of left-branching structures and English has a predominance of right-branching structures. That is to say, Chinese is used to using left branches in its expressions, while English is used to using right branches in its expressions.

*Keywords:* Left Branch (LB), Right Branch (RB), modifier, adverbial, clause

## Introduction

Branching refers to the position of the modifying element or clause in relation to the central word or clause. If the modifying component appears to the left of the central word or clause, that is, before the central word or clause, it is called left branching structure; if the modifying component appears to the right of the central word or clause, that is, after the central word or clause, it is called right branching structure, and from the overall situation, the left branching structure is dominant in Chinese and the right branching structure is dominant in English (Gao, 2002). In compound sentences, the branching structure refers to the position of the modifier and conditional clauses in relation to the central word and clause.

As English and Chinese belong to different language families and their respective linguistic characteristics and laws are different, the distribution of linguistic branching structures in English and Chinese are also different.

In English, the modifier is located to the right of the central clause. Chinese does not have a modifier clause, but there are various phrases that can act as a modifier article (Gao, 2002). Research by scholars such as Jacquelyn Schachter (1996) shows that Chinese students with a predominantly left-branching mother tongue have difficulty in mastering the right-branching structure of the modifier, due to interference from their mother tongue, which is reflected in avoidance of the modifier and the production of structurally incorrect modifiers. Similarly, Peng (2000) finds that subject clauses preceded and followed by subordinate clauses were the main distributional feature of English gerund clauses; Chinese gerund clauses in general unfolded to the left. As a result of the influence of their mother tongue, our students produced English gerund clauses with a strong tendency to branch left.

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### **Differences of English and Chinese Branching Structures**

The left-right branching structures in Chinese and English are mainly found in the modifier and adverbial. As a rule, English expressions usually use the right branching structure, while Chinese expressions usually use the left branching structure.

The left-right branching structures in English and Chinese are also found in the determiner and the gerund. In English, the grammatical components that can act as determiners include finite words, adjectives, nouns, prepositional phrases, participles, infinitives, gerunds and determiners; the grammatical components that can act as gerunds include adverbs, adjectives, participles (phrases), infinitives (phrases), prepositional phrases, phrases, compound structures and gerunds. The grammatical components that can act as determiners in Chinese are: quantifiers, distinguishers, adjectives, nouns, verbs, collateral determiners, phrases, etc. (There are no determiners in Chinese.) The following can be used as gerunds: verbs, adverbs (phrases), quantifiers (phrases), nouns indicating time and place, orientation phrases, clauses, conjunctions, etc.

In terms of sentence order, English is a cis-linear extension, while Chinese is an inverse linear extension. The inverse linear extension of Chinese sentences is characterized by the possibility of adding a theoretically infinite number of modifiers before the main part of the expression, whereas in English the modifiers (especially the modifiers) are mostly postposed.

#### **Branching Structure of Modifiers**

Modifiers of English noun phrases are divided into premodifiers and postmodifiers according to their position in relation to the central word. The premodifier is a left-branch structure; the postmodifier is a right-branch structure. The main components of the left branch of the noun phrase are: adjectives (phrases), nouns (phrases), counters, participles and verbs; the main grammatical components of the right branch are: adjective phrases, prepositional phrases, participle phrases, infinitives (phrases) and determiners.

In general, the English right-branch structure is dominant. In Chinese noun phrases, the modifier, no matter how long it is, is usually placed in front of the central word and is mostly marked with the word “DE”, which is a left-branch structure.

The difference in the branching structure between the English and Chinese languages is reflected in the change in the order of the modifier and the Chinese word or sentence in both the original and the translation. This is reflected in the translation of the modifier in Chinese-English consecutive interpretation, where the Chinese language structure of “modifier + central word (central clause)” is adjusted to the language structure of “central word (central clause) + modifier”. The following aspects have been summarized.

Firstly, if the modifier part in Chinese is in the form of “verb + object” or a single verb, the modifier with a strong action can be placed in the left side of the central word or the middle also clause and expressed in the left branch structure. However, in English there is no way to transform such action-bearing components into nouns, counters, adjectives and other components that can be used as prepositions, so in order to put such determiners in English, the right branching structure needs to be used, using the form “to + V” or “V-ing” to transform the postpositions.

The modifier clause is a grammatical element that exists only in English, and in Chinese sentences the only equivalent is the modifier, which is a modifying and qualifying element. Since there are no modifier clauses in

Chinese, they exist only in English, so the English modifier clause is an adapted translation of the Chinese modifier.

Secondly, when the modifier in the unspoken language contains words indicating the concept of time or place, especially if there is more than one such modifier, the English-Chinese branching structure of the language is different in terms of the position of the temporal and locative articles in the sentence, so that these modifier indicating time or place will be transformed into gerunds when translated into English. On the other hand, when the modifier article in Chinese is a certain industry, concept or other kind of proper noun, the translator will choose to transform this kind of noun modifier article into a gerund to the right of the central word or the central clause when translating into English. To sum up, the modifier article in Chinese is a noun that is used to qualify a certain field or a range of a certain industry. In English, a right branching structure is needed to transform it into a prepositional phrase in the form of a gerund, which is placed to the right of the middle also.

What's more, when such adjectives as "largest", "furthest", "best", etc. appear in the original language in Chinese, when translating into English, choose to use the left branching structure. When more than one definite element appears in the central word, the highest level of the adjective is on the immediate left of the central word. Secondly, in both English and Chinese, the adjectives are generally in short form, and when translating them, it is straightforward to follow the left branching structure of Chinese.

### **Branching Structure of Adverbials**

Different peoples, depending on their habits of thought, have different orders of linguistic expression for the same objective fact. The order in which the thinking of English-speaking peoples reflects reality is mainly: subject - act - object of act - sign of act. The linguistic pattern of expression resulting from this habit of thought is: subject + predicate + object + gerund. Although it is possible for the gerund modifier to appear both before and after the verb, it is more often found after the verb. In other words, right branching structures predominate. This is particularly true of the modifying gerund (i.e. the combining gerund, which is a component of the predicate and is divided by content into time, place, manner, purpose, cause, effect, condition, concession, accompanying condition, etc.). When stating the same objective reality, English and Mandarin use different expressions. The order of expression in Chinese is usually: subject + act marker + act + object. The grammatical equivalent of this is subject + gerund + predicate + object. In contrast, the position of the gerund is relatively fixed in the non-verbal language, usually using a left branch structure.

#### **Adverbial phrases**

Firstly, in the case of the temporal gerund, Chinese is used to placing the temporal gerund earlier in the sentence, while in English the temporal gerund is usually placed later in the sentence.

Secondly, in the case of the locative, it is customary to place it at the front of the sentence, whereas in English it is customary to place it at the back of the sentence. Again, for words such as "for", "about", "this", "to...", "like...", prepositional phrases such as "between...", which have a directional meaning, are often placed earlier in the sentence in Chinese to indicate where the object of the subsequent exposition is located, whereas in English they are customarily placed further back in the sentence.

Thirdly, as far as the modal gerund is concerned, in Chinese we usually say "zenyangzuodao", but it is customary in English to express it as "do...by...", due to the influence of the left-right branching structure of the

English language. However, due to the influence of the left-right branching structure of the English language, it is customary in English to say “do... through...way”, so when translating from Chinese to English, the manner gerund should be placed afterwards.

Finally, in English and Chinese, when prepositional phrases are used as verbal adjuncts, they are positioned or expanded in opposite directions with respect to the verb's central verb. English prepositional phrases generally appear to the right of the central word, while Chinese prepositional phrases generally appear to the left of the central word (Lian, 1993). The difference in the position of the prepositional phrase with respect to the central word poses certain difficulties for interpretation.

#### **Adverbial clauses**

Peng (2000) has expressed his opinion that in English, the position of the dative clause is flexible and can be placed before, during or after the main clause. In English, however, the majority of the language habits are such that the gerund clause is usually placed to the right of the main clause; in Chinese, however, the gerund clause is usually expanded to the left. In another word, in English, the position of the gerund is more flexible, as it can be located before or after the main clause, or it can be inserted into the main clause, but most gerunds follow the order of “main clause before, subordinate clause after”, that is, the gerunds in English expand to the right, while the gerunds in Chinese generally expand to the left. The chronological and logical order in Chinese often follows the sequence of first to last, cause to effect, hypothesis to inference, and fact to conclusion.

Another important difference between Chinese and English prepositions is the order in which the prepositional phrases are arranged to indicate different semantic relationships. The prepositions in English and Chinese can be subdivided semantically into a number of categories, such as temporal, locative, modal and so on. The order in which they are arranged relative to the central word follows a common principle: the closer the semantic relationship between the gerund and the central word, the closer the distance, and the more distant the relationship, the further the distance. The specific position, however, is mirrored and reversed due to the different directions of expansion in Chinese and English (Gao, 2002).

In a word, the normal order in English is: verb, manner, place, time, cause, result, purpose. The normal order in Chinese is: purpose, result, cause, time, place, manner, and verb.

#### **Branching Structure of Compound Sentences**

In a compound sentence, the branching structure refers to the position of the determiner clause and the gerund clause relative to the central word. In English, the modifier clause (including the cognate clause) is located to the right of the central word. The modifier article in English can even contain modifier clauses, i.e. multiple modifier articles, which expand to the right of the sentence. There are no modifier clauses in Chinese, but there are various phrases that can act as modifier clauses. These phrases are usually located to the left of the central word. English adverbial clause generally tends to end at the end of the sentence, i.e. after the central clause. “The distribution of clause order between main and subordinate clauses in English compound sentences varies according to the style. In formal English corpora, the distribution of main and subordinate clauses is roughly equal, but the proportion of subordinate clauses before and main clauses after is high; as the status of the corpora decreases, the distribution of main and subordinate clauses is more or less balanced; while in a mixed language category like fiction, main clauses before and subordinate clauses after becomes the main distribution pattern” (Peng, 2000, p. 331). There are,

however, cases where the dative clause appears in a left-branching structure, such as expressing the speaker's point of view, most subordinate clauses that describe the content of the entire central clause in terms of time, place, manner, degree, frequency, etc. The Chinese gerunds are generally leftward in their expansion.

Firstly, in English, the definite clause is in principle located to the right of the antecedent. Although there are no definite clauses in Chinese, there are various words and phrases that can play the role of definite modifiers (Gao, 2002), and these phrases are generally located to the left of the central word.

Secondly, the Lancaster-Oslo/Bergen written corpus and the London-Lund oral corpus with a sample of 100,000 words show that 10.3% of the reason clauses are at the beginning of the sentence (left branch) and 89.57% are at the end (right branch). Kirkpatrick (1993) finds that Chinese speakers generally state their reasons first and then their opinions when arguing their views, forming a kind of "because a so" structure.

### Conclusion

Because of the different language families to which English and Chinese belong, their left and right branching structures are distributed differently. Although both English and Chinese have branching structures, the overall situation shows that English is the language with a predominant right branching structure, while Chinese is the language with a predominant left branching structure. Therefore, the analysis of the above examples leads to the following conclusion: in most cases, the right branching structure in English can be treated as the left branching structure in Chinese according to the difference in branching structure between English and Chinese; however, we have to analyze specific problems and cannot treat all right branching structures in English as left branching structures in Chinese.

In addition, if there is a short or long part in a sentence, English often puts the short part first and then the long part, i.e. the head is light and the foot is heavy, while the order in Chinese tends to be the opposite; the chronological and logical order in Chinese often follows the order of first to last, cause to effect, hypothesis to inference, fact to conclusion, while English can be flexibly arranged according to the meaning and structure of the sentence with the help of morphological changes and abundant connecting words, and the order is often different from Chinese.

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