The C-E Translation Strategies of Run-on Sentences*

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Run-on sentences are used frequently in daily life and literature; however, there is no corresponding sentence pattern in English. Therefore, it is challenging for translators to render run-on sentences into idiomatic English. This paper introduces the definition, classification, and the translation of run-on sentences, aiming to summarize the common rules of its translation.

Keywords: Chinese run-on sentences, Chinese-English translation, translation strategies

Introduction

Run-on sentence is a special sentence pattern, which can reflect the substantive characteristics of Chinese. Lv was the first to point out the existence of run-on sentences in Chinese, "one clause follows another, which can be broken or connected in many places" (Lv, 1979, p. 23). Run-on sentences can "reflect some essence of Chinese syntactic structure" (Wu & Liang, 1992, p. 316). Chinese run-on sentences are composed of multiple sentence segments. The discrete language units and few conjunctions show the loose form of them, which are usually connected by the sentence meaning.

In recent years, the academic circles have made new progress in the study of run-on sentences. In late 1990s, some scholars began to study the English translation of Chinese run-on sentences. The author input the keywords like "run-on sentences", "translation of run-on sentences", "English translation of run-on sentences", and others into CNKI, and found that the current translation strategy research of run-on sentences can be divided into following directions:

Some scholars, represented by Wang and Zhao, have summarized various classification models and standards of run-on sentences thoroughly, and they compared the structure of Chinese run-on sentences and English complex sentences systematically, emphasizing their differences in sentence pattern (Wang & Zhao, 2017, pp. 35-38). Some scholars, represented by Hu, mainly considered the "integration of the main idea (topic, theme, comment, etc.)" from cognition and translation of run-on sentences, and believed "grasping the topic and pattern of run-on sentences is the premise, key and basis of reproducing their beauty" (Hu, 1999, p. 47); Sun focused on the "negative transfer" in run-on sentences translation, who provides a new reference for the study of second language acquisition and English teaching (Sun, 2015, pp. 20-21).

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In recent years, more and more attention has been paid to their translation strategy. Some scholars have tried to analyze translation strategies from lexical and syntactic structure (Tao, 2014, pp. 133-135). In addition, some scholars have tried to discuss the consecutive interpreting strategy, which has pioneered the study of run-on sentences in the field of interpretation (Lv, 2010, pp. 138-140).

Although run-on sentences translation has made some progress and absorbed much attention, the above researches are not enough to study its translation strategies. What strategies should be taken in the translation of run-on sentences and how to translate them into idiomatic English remain to be explored. This paper will analyze the above problems through example analysis.

Cognition of Chinese Run-on Sentences

Definition and Characteristics of Run-on Sentences

As early as the late 1970s, some scholars began to study and analyze run-on sentences from different perspectives. Since Lv first described run-on sentences, other scholars proposed different opinions. Hu and Jin insisted that run-on sentences are unique in Chinese complex sentences, and they not only exist in oral communication, but also in literary works (Hu & Jin, 1989, pp. 42-54). Wu and other scholars further discussed the structure of run-on sentences according to their semantics as well as arrangement and combination (Wu & Liang, 1992, pp. 316-351). Xu and other scholars found that although run-on sentences show the characteristics of parataxis, they still comply with the rigorous grammatical features (Xu, 2002, pp. 10-14). Some scholars pointed out that, "First of all, a run-on sentence includes at least two independent clauses. Secondly, the clauses are connected without conjunctions" (B. Zhang, Fan, & Y. J. Zhang, 2002, p. 265). To sum up, the clauses of run-on sentences are mainly united by explicit or implicit logic. The difference between run-on sentences and Chinese complex sentences is the closer semantic relationship and higher use of conjunctions of the latter.

Classification of Chinese Run-on Sentences

Many scholars regard run-on sentences as complex sentences, so the classification of complex sentences provides some references to run-on sentences. "Dichotomy", "trichotomy", and "quartering" are three common classification methods, and "dichotomy" is the most representative one. Since the middle of 1980s, "dichotomy" has been widely accepted by major textbooks and academic research institutes. However, it has various shortcomings such as obscure explanation of facts and lack of foundation (Wang & Zhao, 2017, pp. 35-38).

Lv has classified complex sentences from the aspects of subject and conjunction: (1) Each clause has the same subject and uses conjunctions; (2) each clause has the same subject, but does not use or partially uses conjunctions; (3) each clause has different subjects and uses conjunctions; (4) each clause has different subjects, and does not use or partially uses conjunctions. The above method breaks away from the traditional classification based on logical and semantic relations, and regards the subject and conjunction as the classification principle, which has important significance for the classification of run-on sentences.

Difficulties and Strategies in the Translation of Run-on Sentences

Difficulties in English Translation of Run-on Sentences

For the translation of run-on sentences, the biggest difficulty lies in how to balance the huge sentence structure differences between English and Chinese.

Liu has mentioned that English sentence structure shows the characteristic of closure, which takes subject-predicate structure as core. So whether the English sentence ends can be judged by its grammatical structure (Liu, 2005, pp. 327-329). What's more, there are strict grammatical and written restrictions in English sentences. For example, the first English letter in each sentence must be capitalized. Such stipulations show the bounded and closed nature of English syntax.

Compared with English sentences, Chinese sentences show strong openness. They are not fettered by grammatical rules and strive to present the complete meaning rather than the complete sentence structure. Therefore, a Chinese sentence can be extended as long as there is still information to express. The recursion of language is fully displayed in Chinese sentences, especially in Chinese run-on sentences.

In short, a complete English sentence is marked by a complete sentence structure, while a complete Chinese sentence is marked by complete meaning expression. This makes the English translation of run-on sentences more difficult and challenging than other Chinese sentence patterns. The following parts will explore the translation processes and strategies of run-on sentences.

English Translation Strategies of Run-on Sentences

Distinguish semantic relationships as well as primary and secondary information. Compared with other Chinese sentences, run-on sentences are more complex in content and looser in structure. Moreover, influenced by Chinese implicit personality, Chinese sentences prefer to hide the true intention, which leads to the mixed primary and secondary information. However, English expression is more logical and explicit than Chinese. In order to make the translation include all original information as much as possible and fit the reading habits of target readers, it is necessary to distinguish semantic relationships as well as primary and secondary information in the first step. This requires translators not only to be proficient in English grammar and sentence patterns, but also to be proficient in Chinese language and culture.

Example 1 is the appearance description of Hsiang Lin's wife in Lu's *The New Year's Sacrifice*. As the leader of modern vernacular novels, Lu frequently used colloquial descriptions and run-on sentences.

Example 1: You yi nian de dong chu, si shu jia li yao huan nv gong, zuo zhong ren de wei lao po zi dai ta jin lai le, tou shang zha zhe bai sheng, ..., nian ji da yue er shi liu qi, lian se qing huang, dan liang jia que hai shi hong de. (*The New Year's Sacrifice*, Lu)

Translation 1-1: At the beginning of winter one year they decided to change maids at Fourth Uncle's place. And so it was that Old Lady Wei, acting as go-between, led a new servant into the house. Hair tied back… She looked to be twenty-six or twenty-seven and was on the whole rather pale, though her cheeks were rosy. (Lyell)

Translation 1-2: (1) Early one winter, (2) when my uncle's family wanted a new maid, (3) old Mrs. Wei the go-between brought along. She had a white mourning band round her hair … Her age was about twenty-six, and though her face was sallow her cheeks were red. (Yang & Yang)

Firstly, both of the above translations divide the sentence information into two parts. The first part: the reason of the event; the second part: the appearance description of Hsiang Lin's wife. In this way, the original information is expressed more clearly.

Secondly, translation strategies are different in words selection. Mr. Yang, as a native Chinese speaker, could perceive the core information in the original. For example, "si shu" are translated into "my uncle". The word "si (four)" shows the seniority in the family, which is not the primary information, so it is omitted in the

Translation 1-2. Williams A. Lyell is a famous American translator; he retained the literal information of the original. However, in western culture, people often use names rather than ages or seniority to address others. So "Fourth Uncle" in Translation 1-1 differs from the expression habits of target readers. For another example, the age description of "er shi liu qi" refers to the vague expression of age (about twenty-six/about twenty-seven) rather than an exact expression (she is either twenty-six or twenty-seven). Therefore, compared with "She looked to be twenty-six or twenty-seven" in Translation 1-1, "Her age was about twenty-six" in Translation 1-2 fully expresses the meaning and intention of the original and retains the flavor of Chinese.

In addition, "You yi nian de dong chu, <u>si shu</u> jia li yao huan nv gong, zuo zhong ren de wei lao po zi dai ta jin lai le" is composed of three clauses with different topics, which seem to be in parallel in sentence form. However, the first and second clauses in original are not transformed into independent sentences but adverbials of time (Clauses (1) and (2)) to modify the core information (Clause (3)) in Translation 1-2. Such a translation strategy highlights the core information in the original.

Sometimes, although translators know that English and Chinese are different in grammatical structure, sentence structure, and expression habits, how to manage such differences in run-on sentences translation is still a significant topic which needs to be discussed.

Ascertain the appropriate subject. As mentioned above, Chinese emphasizes parataxis and semantic coherence; what's more, the subjects in run-on sentences are often hidden and one subject is often used in more than one clause. However, English attaches great importance to the complete sentence structure and subjects are the essential part of English sentences. Therefore, translators should find topic center of the original to ascertain the appropriate subject for English translation.

Example 2: Hua shuo tian xia da shi, fen jiu bi he, he jiu bi fen. (*Romance of The Three Kingdoms*, Luo)

Translation 2: Domains under heaven, after a long period of division, tends to unite; after a long period of union, tends to divide. (Brewitt-Taylor)

It is easy to found that the first clause is converted into the subject of last two clauses in Translation 2. It not only retains the English expression habits and complies with the English grammar rules, but also reserves the core information and style of the original.

In general, some topics in run-on sentences can be converted into subjects in English translation, but not all run-on sentences are suitable for this principle. That's because if translators convert each topic of the clause into subject, semantic fluency, coherence, and smoothness of the translation will be reduced.

Choose appropriate sentence patterns. Chinese run-on sentences are not restricted by grammatical rules, and they can be just connected by semantics and commas. So the translators should recombine the original text first and then use appropriate strategies or skills to translate the run-on sentences for the logical and well-structured translation.

Example 3: Dong shi mai jun ma, xi shi mai an jian, nan shi mai pei tou, bei shi mai chang bian. (*The Ballad of Mulan*)

Translation 3:

> She buys a steed at eastern fair,
> A whip and saddle here and there.
> She buys a bridle at the south,
> And metal bit for the horse's mouth. (Xu)

Mr. Xu is a leading translator in China. Referring to Mr. Xu's work, the author suggests that translators should reorganize the original information and choose appropriate sentence patterns on the basis of being faithful to the original.

Summary

Based on the analysis of various examples, the author concludes the "three-step" strategy of Chinese run-on sentences translation. First step: distinguish semantic relationships as well as primary and secondary information. Second step: The author should choose the appropriate subject. Third step: The translator should choose appropriate sentence patterns and use translation skills flexibly to transform the Chinese run-on sentences into smooth and idiomatic English.

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