

German Translation Strategies of Chinese Flowing Sentences: A Case Study on *Xi Jinping Erzählt Geschichten Über Die Kommunistische Partei Chinas*

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With the continuous construction of China's foreign external discourse system, the significance of party history, as an official historical document of the party, in telling a good Chinese story and spreading a good Chinese voice, cannot be ignored. The book *Xi Jinping Erzählt Geschichten Über Die Kommunistische Partei Chinas* includes more than 80 stories of Communist Party of China (CPC) party history told by General Secretary Xi Jinping, with focused narratives and distinctive thematic ideas. Its prominent linguistic feature is that it contains many flowing sentences composed of multiple clauses with loose structure, characteristic of Chinese syntax. Given this linguistic feature, this paper will clarify the logical relationship between the clauses in the Chinese flowing sentences with the help of the Thematic Progression under the Theme-Rheme Theory, to choose a suitable translation strategy to make the German translation fluent without losing information. It is hoped that this study can enrich the research field of flowing sentences, provide a reference for the German translation strategy of Party history at the micro level, and promote the dissemination of Party history literature in German-speaking countries, to strengthen the influence of Chinese culture and the credibility of Chinese discourse in the international arena.

Keywords: *Xi Jinping Erzählt Geschichten Über Die Kommunistische Partei Chinas*, flowing sentences, Thematic Progression, German translation strategies

Introduction

The history of the Communist Party of China (CPC) is a vast and magnificent epic, presenting the footprints of the CPC's struggle for the Chinese people's happiness and the Chinese nation's rejuvenation during the past century. *Xi Jinping Erzählt Geschichten Über Die Kommunistische Partei Chinas* is a book that links historical imprints with vivid Party figures in concrete stories. As a text of party history stories, narrative is the most prominent feature of the original language. Regarding how the theme unfolds, it describes mostly completed and separate historical events, often constructing chapters based on the events' time process or development trend. The original text's narrative language style is embodied in many flowing sentences in Chinese. The source text

is oriented to the public, and quotes a lot of characters' paraphrases and dialogues, etc., with authentic Chinese expressions, many clauses following one another, no obvious articulations between them, and a loose structure, which enhances the coherence and readability of the text in the seemingly fragmented and unstructured expressions. Therefore, based on the examples of flowing sentences that appear in the source text, this paper explores the German translation strategy of flowing sentences under the Thematic Progression, in order to summarize the translation methods and techniques that can be adopted for the German translation of flowing sentences.

The Study of Chinese Flowing Sentences

First of all, as to what is a flowing sentence, Lü (1979) first used the name "flowing sentence" and proposed a definition, which means

the use of a clause as the basic unit instead of a sentence is better suited to the Chinese language, the reason is that the spoken Chinese language is characterized by many flowing sentences, with one clause following another, and many places can be broken or connected. (p. 27)

Since then, the study of flowing sentences has gradually attracted the attention of academics. Secondly, Hu and Jin (1989, p. 52) pointed out that "the semantic links between clauses are relatively loose, and it is generally difficult to add related words that indicate some kind of close logical relationship".

In the classification study of Chinese flowing sentences, Wu and Liang (1992) first classified flowing sentences more systematically, defining them as compound sentences. And Cui and Wang (2019) reconsidered the typological division of flowing sentences from the viewpoint of the reference of the implied subject in flowing sentences, which are divided into two basic types: homophonic flowing sentences and heterophonic flowing sentences.

As in the example sentence: (1) 我们用的是土地雷, (2) 用水泥纸包好4个雷管, (3) 每个雷管装二两五炸药, (4) 接上起爆装置, (5) 埋入地里, (6) 就成了地雷。

The example sentence is from *Xi Jinping Erzählt Geschichten Über Die Kommunistische Partei Chinas*, a typical flowing sentence, with the clauses loosely structured but all centered on the same topic. Only Clauses (1) and (3) have a subject, namely "我们" and "每个雷管", and "每个雷管" refers back to the object of Clause (2). In other clauses, although the subject is implied, there are also cross-clauses references, for example, the implied subject of Clause (2) takes over the subject of Clause (1), "我们", and the subjects of Clauses (4), (5), and (6) take over the subject of Clause (3), "雷管". Therefore, according to the classification of Cui and Wang, this sentence is a hetero-referential flowing sentence, and the hetero-referential component is two, which belongs to the two-referential flowing sentence.

With the deepening of the research, the translation problem of Chinese flowing sentences has also become one of the focuses of the academic community, mainly focusing on English translation research. For example, Zhao and Wang (2020), by comparing Chinese flowing sentences and English complex sentences, pointed out that the difference in the syntactic features between the two is the external manifestation of the essential differences between the two languages, the root of which lies in the strong spatial qualities of Chinese and the strong temporal qualities of English.

To summarize, there is a lot of research in academic circles on the essential characteristics of Chinese flowing sentences. As a special sentence pattern in Chinese, the flowing sentence has always been one of the major difficulties in translation, but there is still a lack of systematic and instructive research on specific translation strategies, and the research has not yet been generally carried out among many languages. Based on the previous study, this paper defines the flowing sentence as “syntactically, it consists of two or more independent clauses with a loose structure, containing no or fewer associative words, and the subject is often hidden; semantically, the independent clauses are coherent, centering on the same topic”, and this is used as a criterion for filtering the flowing sentence.

Research on the Theme-Rheme Theory and the Thematic Progression

The Theme-Rheme Theory originally emerged from the Prague School of Structuralist Linguistics. According to the differences in the distribution of information in a sentence and the different roles of the various components of a sentence for the meaning of the whole sentence, the Prague school divides a sentence into three parts: the theme, the rheme, and the transition (Song, 2008). Among them, the theme is the starting point of the discourse, which is usually known; the rheme is the core of the discourse, which is generally new information, and “there is a complementary illustrative function between the theme and the rheme of the sentence, and the theme, as the object being talked about, is the entry point and starting point of the new information” (Zhang, 2016, pp. 210-211). Firbas (1964), a linguist of the Prague school, explained the importance of the theme, transition, and rheme in his published work.

There are many different definitions of the division of the theme and rheme. If from the point of view of discourse order, the constituent at the beginning of the sentence is the theme, and the remaining part is the rheme; if from the point of view of the communicative mobility that drives the transfer of information, the one that is low in communicative mobility is the theme, and on the contrary, it is the rheme (Wang, 1988). However, the object of study in this paper is the relevant utterances in a complete political text, and the context of the discourse needs to be taken into account in the process of translation. Therefore, this paper will start from the perspective of discourse context, and define the theme as the known information that can be learned through the context, and the rheme as the new information that cannot be deduced from the context.

After clarifying the definition of theme and rheme, it can be seen that the continuous advancement of the theme in the clauses makes the discourse unfold, and in the process of discourse unfolding, the sender of the message will maintain or change the relationship of the theme and the rheme between the clauses by the communicative message to be conveyed and the purpose of communication, and this relationship tends to follow a certain pattern or path of development, which is also known as the Thematic Progression. This progression was first proposed by Daneš of the Prague School (Zhang, 2016). Since this translation case study is translated from Chinese to German, in the process of translation, it is necessary to divide the topic and comment of the flowing sentences, so in the process of constructing the translation, this paper tends to adopt the four modes of Thematic Progression proposed by the Chinese scholar Xu Shenghuan.

Xu (1982) summarized sentence combinations into four developmental patterns: parallelism, concentration, continuation, and crossover. However, due to the complexity of the expression of ideas, the same sentence combination often needs to use a variety of ways of progression to take up the task of expression; for such types

of advancement that cannot be summarized by a separate mode, this paper will be collectively referred to as the comprehensive type.

(a) The Parallel Type of Thematic Progression, i.e., the theme is the same, the rheme is different, which can be expressed as T1-R1, T2(=T1)-R2, ..., Tn(=T1)-Rn.

(b) The Centralized Type of Thematic Progression, i.e., with different themes and the same rheme, which can be expressed as T1-R1, T2-R2(=R1), ..., Tn-Rn(=R1).

(c) The Continuation Type of Thematic Progression, i.e., the rheme or part of the rheme of the previous clause develops into the theme of the subsequent clause, which can be represented as T1-R1, T2(=R1)-R2, ..., Tn(=Rn-1)-Rn.

(d) The Cross Type of Thematic Progression, i.e., the theme of the first clause becomes the rheme of the second clause, and the theme of the second clause becomes the rheme of the third clause, and so on, which can be expressed as T1-R1, T2-R2(=T1), ..., Tn-Rn(=Tn-1).

Accordingly, according to the structural distribution of “topic-comment”, the topic or comment of each succeeding clause in Chinese flowing sentences will be extended from the topic or comment of the first clause in different patterns. Shao (2001) analyzed the types of topic advancement from the perspectives of the source of the topic and the mode of extension, while Sheng (2016) classified the types of topic advancement among the clauses of flowing clauses into three major categories, namely, topic extension advancement, comment extension advancement, and comprehensive extension advancement. Therefore, in this paper, by studying the topic extension mode of Chinese flowing sentences and combining a variety of factors, such as semantic relations and German expression, different modes of Thematic Progression can be adopted, so that the translation is not overly faithful to the Theme-Rheme structure of the original text, but not too far away from it, and the narrative style of the original text can be preserved as much as possible while achieving linguistic fluency.

Translation Cases Analysis

According to the theoretical basis above, when the topic and the comment of each clause of a flowing sentence present a certain topic advancement type, it can be considered that the corresponding Thematic Progression can be chosen or translated into a more appropriate Thematic Progression in the German context, so as to start from a global point of view and to break the limitation of translating by only seeking for the accuracy of the words.

Strategy 1: Translation to the Parallel Type of Thematic Progression

Chinese: 组织上每月发给他的津贴，他留下一角钱交团费，两角买肥皂，再用些钱买书，好扩充他的“小图书馆”，其余的钱，全部存入银行。

German: Von dem monatlichen Taschengeld, das ihm die Organisation gewährte, behielt er ein Jiao (10 Cent chinesischer Währung), um den Beitrag des Kommunistischen Jugendbunds zu bezahlen, zwei Jiao, um Seife zu kaufen, und noch etwas Geld, um Bücher zu kaufen und so seine „kleine Bibliothek“ zu erweitern. Der Rest seines Geldes wurde auf der Bank hinterlegt.

The sentence describes how Lei Feng handles his monthly allowance and daily expenses. From the syntactic level, the sentence contains the subject “他”. From the pragmatic level, the first clause “组织上每月发给他的津贴” is the topic of the whole sentence, which implies the prepositions “关于”, “对于” and so on in the syntactic

structure. The subsequent clauses are all explanations of the topic and form a parallelism, i.e., the topic “津贴” derives from “一角钱”, “两角”, “其余的钱”, and other juxtaposition of different sub-topics, and lead to “交团费”, “买肥皂”, “买书”, and other comments, to complete the coherent expression of the sentence, which belongs to the topic extension type of advancement. When translating, the translator can add a preposition with the meaning of “about” and place it at the beginning of the sentence, keep the topic of the original text as the theme, and use the “um...zu” syntax to translate each of the rhemes; the theme of the last sentence is “Der Rest seines Geldes”, where the second genitive also refers back to the theme “Von dem monatlichen Taschengeld, das ihm die Organisation gewährte”, so a parallel type of Thematic Progression is used to construct the translation.

Strategy 2: Translation to the Centralized Type of Thematic Progression

Chinese: (1) 我国将这项国际任务分解为建站选址调查和建站工程两部分, (2) 国家海洋局负责建站选址调查, (3) 海军负责建站工程。

German: Unser Land hatte diese internationale Aufgabe in zwei Teile unterteilt: die Untersuchung der Standortwahl für die Station und das Projekt zum Bau der Station. Das staatliche Meeresamt war für ersteren und die Marine für letzteren verantwortlich.

According to the semantic relationship, this flowing sentence is a generalized paraphrase structure. Clauses (2) and (3) are the subparagraphs of the topic clause. They are parallel, presenting the parallel topic extension advancement of T1-R1, T2-R1, T3-R1, so the translator chooses the centralized type of Thematic Progression to construct the translation. The rheme of the first clause is “die Untersuchung der Standortwahl für die Station und das Projekt zum Bau der Station”, and the rhemes of the next two clauses are translated as follows “war für ersteren verantwortlich” and “war für letzteren verantwortlich”. The words “ersteren” and “letzteren” are used to complete the reference back, which is consistent with the general structure of the original sentence, and at the same time avoids the repetition of the rheme which makes the content too cumbersome.

Strategy 3: Translation to the Continuation Type of Thematic Progression

Chinese: (1) 县委先后抽调了120名干部、农民和技术员, (2) Ø组成一支三结合的“三害”调查队, (3) Ø在全县展开了大规模的追洪水、查风口、探流沙的调查研究工作。

German: Das Kreisparteikomitee hat nacheinander 120 Kader, Landwirte und Techniker mobilisiert, um ein dreigliedriges „drei schweren Naturkatastrophen“-Untersuchungsteam zu bilden. Dieses Team hatte eine groß angelegte Untersuchungs- und Forschungsarbeit im Kreis eingeleitet, um Überschwemmungen zu verfolgen, Windauslässe zu überprüfen und Treibsand aufzuspüren.

This flowing sentence consists of three clauses. The topic of Clause (1) is “县委”, the subject of Clause (2), i.e., the topic, is omitted, and is the comment of Clause (1), which is “120名干部、农民和技术员”, and the subject of Clause (3) is also omitted from the comment of Clause (2), which is “‘三害’调查队”. Thus, the flowing sentence follows the T1-R1, T2(=R1)-R2, T3(=R2)-R3, ... of a linear comment extension advancement. The translator chooses the corresponding continuation type of Thematic Progression, translating the topic of the original text as the theme of the first sentence “Das Kreisparteikomitee”, and the explanatory relationship between Clauses (1) and (2) is expressed by the phrase “um... zu”, while the subject of Clause (3) is made explicit; “Dieses Team” refers back to “„drei schweren Naturkatastrophen’-Untersuchungsteam” in the previous clause as the theme, thus completing the semantic coherence.

Strategy 4: Translation to the Cross Type of Thematic Progression

Chinese: (1) 他穿的袜子, (2) 补了一层又一层, 最后, (3) Ø完全改了样, (4) Ø还舍不得丢。

German: Die Socken, die er trug, wurden Schicht für Schicht geflickt, bis sie schließlich ganz aus der Form geraten waren. Aber er wollte sie immer noch nicht wegwerfen.

In context, “他” in the sentence refers to Lei Feng, and the first clause “他穿的袜子” is topic T1, while the last two clauses are non-complete subject-predicate clauses, which are preceded by the omission of the subject, namely “袜子” (T2=T1) and “他” (T3, which is the attributive component in T1), so the topics of the succeeding clauses are extended from the topics of the first clause, and the flowing sentence belongs to the topic extension type of advancement. The translation “Die Socken, die er trug” is the theme T1, “wurden Schicht für Schicht geflickt” is part of the rheme R1, and the clause introduced by “bis” is used to translate the implicit succession relationship of the original text, and “sie” is added to refer to the theme in the previous sentence. The last sentence adds “er” as the theme T2 of the sentence; “wollte sie immer noch nicht wegwerfen” is the rheme, in which “sie” refers back to the theme T1. In this way, the translation constitutes a cross-type of Thematic Progression, which explains the succession and interpretation relationship between the original clauses through the cross-development of the theme and rheme.

Strategy 5: Translation to the Comprehensive Type of Thematic Progression

Chinese: (1) 他身先士卒、以身作则, (2) 风沙最大的时候, (3) 带头去查风口, 探流沙; (4) 大雨瓢泼的时候, (5) 他带头蹚着齐腰深的洪水察看洪水流势; (6) 风雪铺天盖地的时候, (7) 他率领干部访贫问苦, (8) 登门为群众送救济粮款。

German: Jiao ging mit gutem Beispiel voran: Als der Wind und der Sand am stärksten waren, übernahm er die Führungsrolle, um den Windauslass zu überprüfen und den Treibsand zu erkunden; als es wie aus Kannen goss, leitete er das Team und watete er durch hüfthohe Überschwemmungen, um deren Strömung zu beobachten; bei windigem und verschneitem Wetter führte er seine Kader dazu, die Armen zu besuchen und sich über ihre Leiden zu erkundigen, ihnen Lieferung von Nahrungsmitteln und Geld nach Hause zu bringen.

This flowing sentence consists of eight clauses. The first clause “他身先士卒、以身作则” serves as the topic clause to lead the whole sentence, and the subsequent clauses are the explanations of this clause. Therefore, the topic and comment of each clause are extended from the first clause, which belongs to the comprehensive extension type of advancement. As the topics of each clause refer to different contents and comments, it is impossible to simply use a certain Thematic Progression to construct the translation. The translator chooses to retain the original topic clause and translate it as “Jiao ging mit gutem Beispiel voran”, using two sentence themes “Als der Wind und der Sand am stärksten waren” and “als es wie aus Kannen goss” and a marking theme “bei windigem und verschneitem Wetter” to translate the themes of the three parallel clauses, and uses verbs, such as “die Führungsrolle übernehmen”, “leiten”, and “führen zu” in the rheme to echo the “Beispiel” in the theme, highlighting Jiao Yulu’s leading role in tackling the “三害” in Lankao County.

Conclusion

Regarding the German translation of Chinese flowing sentences, this paper starts from the theoretical framework of Theme-Rheme Theory and uses the topic and comment of flowing sentences and the corresponding topic advancement types to provide theoretical support for the construction of German translation. By analyzing

the semantic relationship of flowing sentences, this paper further explores how to choose appropriate translation strategies according to the structure of the original text in the translation process.

The topic and comment in Chinese flowing sentences often present multiple extension types. According to the differences in syntactic structure between Chinese and German, translators should choose the appropriate Thematic Progression according to the logical relationship between the clauses. When the original text describes the same topic from different angles, the translation can also adopt the same mode, choosing the parallel type of Thematic Progression, and developing the description of the same theme through different rhemes; when the topic changes, but the comment content becomes sentence group information and is constantly repeated, and the translation can also follow the information structure of the original text and translate into a centralized type of Thematic Progression to highlight the information value of the rheme; when the comment is constantly extended in the process of information advancement and becomes a new topic, the translation should also use the continuation type of Thematic Progression to make the translation continue to deepen and perfect in the chain development of the rheme; when the topic of previous clause of a flowing sentence becomes the comment of the next clause, and the development continues in this way, the translation also needs to strengthen the internal connection of the clauses through the cross of the theme and the rheme; flowing sentences with many clauses and complex semantic relationships usually use a combination of multiple Thematic Progressions, and when translating, reasonable Thematic Progressions should also be selected comprehensively to disassemble and translate sentences with complex structures to ensure the clarity and completeness of the sentence meanings.

The translation process highlights the treatment methods and practical concerns of Chinese flowing sentence translation, which can enhance the translator's sensitivity to the unique sentence patterns or language phenomena in Chinese and the evaluation of the target language output when analyzing the source language and provide a new methodology for translators to translate similar texts. Based on the German translation of flowing sentences, the paper innovates the translation strategy and system of "Party History Stories", writes a new perspective and new path for the external dissemination of the history of the Communist Party of China, and better shows the fine style and glorious image of our party to the German-speaking countries and the world.

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