

Chinese Translation Strategies for Japanese Long Sentences From the Perspective of Communicative Translation Theory

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Due to its structural mechanisms, the Japanese language naturally tends to form long sentences with complex structures and dense information. In contrast, Chinese favors parataxis and concise clauses. This fundamental difference makes the Chinese translation of Japanese long sentences a prominent challenge. Mechanical correspondence often leads to obscure logic and strong “translationese” in the target text, severely undermining its readability and expressiveness. Peter Newmark’s Communicative Translation Theory, which prioritizes the receptive effect of the target language readers and advocates breaking free from formal constraints to achieve functional equivalence, provides theoretical guidance for this problem. Based on this theory, this paper proposes a set of translation strategies centered on “logical chain” analysis. It systematically elaborates how to transform Japanese long sentences into natural, fluent, and equivalently effective translations that conform to Chinese expression habits through logical deconstruction, logical explication, and syntactic reconstruction, aiming to provide a specific methodological reference for related translation practices.

Keywords: Communicative Translation Theory, Japanese long sentences, logical chain, translation strategy

Introduction

In translation practice, the Chinese translation of long Japanese sentences has always been a complex challenge. As an agglutinative language, Japanese relies on particles and other grammatical elements to connect semantic clusters, making it prone to forming long sentences with intricate structures and implicit logic. In contrast, Chinese, as an isolating language, favors parataxis with concise clauses and explicit logic. This fundamental difference means that word-for-word translations often result in disordered syntax and “translationese,” which not only undermines the original message and emotional tone, but also deviates from the cognitive habits of Chinese readers. Peter Newmark’s (2001) Communicative Translation Theory provides a pathway to address this issue. Centered on the “reader effect,” this theory advocates breaking free from the formal constraints of the source language and pursuing creative reconstruction in the target language. Its principle of being “reader-centered and effect-oriented” precisely addresses the fundamental tension between form and content, fidelity and fluency, in the translation of long Japanese sentences. Guided by this theory, this paper will explore systematic strategies for translating long Japanese sentences into Chinese.

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Characteristics of Japanese Long Sentences and Difficulties in Their Translation

A clear definition and distinct characterization of the translation object form the foundation of research. Regarding the definition of long sentences in Japanese, scholars from China and Japan have conducted in-depth studies. Based on the research of Japanese scholar Kenji Morioka, Wu Deqing (2012) pointed out that “According to data from the psychology of writing, sentences with 26 characters or fewer are considered short, those with 27-43 characters are medium, and those with 44 characters or more are long. If a sentence exceeds 75 characters, it tends to cause psychological difficulty for the reader.” Structurally, Japanese long sentences are generally complex sentences composed of multiple clauses. Shigehiro Kato et al. (2014) argued that “A sentence consisting of one main clause and one or more subordinate clauses is called a complex sentence.” Kong Fanming (1983) noted that Japanese long sentences typically possess three elements: (a) a high frequency of modifiers, especially long attributive modifiers; (b) numerous coordinate structures; and (c) multiple layers of structure. Zhai Dongna (2006) categorized Japanese complex sentences into three structural types: “First, embedded complex sentences; second, subordinate complex sentences; and third, cleft sentences.”

Taken together, the research by Chinese and Japanese scholars not only provides intuitive criteria for identifying “long sentences” through quantitative measures, but also reveals the complexity of their internal composition through grammatical structure analysis. These two perspectives collectively illustrate that a typical Japanese long sentence is not merely an accumulation of characters, but a linguistic complex characterized by lengthy modifiers, nested structural layers, implicit logical relationships, and highly dense information. These features directly give rise to the core difficulties in Chinese translation practice.

First, lengthy and embedded modifying structures often lead to piled-up attributives, obscured subjects, and disordered sentence order in Chinese translations.

Second, implicit logical relationships (such as causation or contrast suggested by conjunctive particles or word order), if not made explicit, can cause comprehension gaps and logical confusion for Chinese readers.

Finally, the Japanese sentence structure, which is “predicate-centered with information placed at the end,” starkly conflicts with Chinese expressive habits, which are “topic-oriented with information arranged in short, flowing clauses.” Direct transplantation often results in translations that are verbose and awkward, failing to align with the rhythm and flow of Chinese.

Thus, translating Japanese long sentences is far from a simple linguistic conversion. It requires accurately deconstructing their complex forms and implicit logic before undertaking cross-language reorganization and reconstruction. The key challenge this study seeks to address is how to effectively resolve the aforementioned difficulties—faithfully conveying the dense information of the original text while producing a translation that is smooth, natural, and aligned with the cognitive habits of Chinese readers. This paper will introduce Peter Newmark’s Communicative Translation Theory, and guided by its core principle of being “reader-effect-centered,” construct a systematic translation strategy.

Translation Strategies Guided by Communicative Translation Theory

The renowned British translation theorist Peter Newmark (2001) was the first to put forward the approach of communicative translation. He argued that “Communicative translation attempts to render the exact contextual meaning of the original in such a way that both content and language are readily acceptable and comprehensible to the readership”; while “In general, a semantic translation is written at the author’s linguistic level, a

communicative at the readership's." Wang Dongfeng (2020) interpreted communicative translation as follows: "Communicative translation is a kind of equivalent-effect translation. Breaking the bondage of the original text's literal form, it is effect-oriented, allowing translators to interpret the original text relatively freely, adjust its style, eliminate ambiguities, and clear obstacles for target language readers." Yuan Hong (2003) held that "Communicative translation is relatively subjective, focusing on the response of target text readers. It makes the source language subordinate to the target language and target culture, leaving no doubts or obscurities for readers. To this end, translators may revise the original work, but this does not mean they can disrespect the source text, for the source text, after all, remains the sole source of translation." To sum up, the core of Newmark's Communicative Translation Theory lies in its target-reader-centered stance, the pursuit of functional "equivalence of effect," and the legitimacy it grants to translators for creative handling to overcome communicative barriers. Subsequent interpretations by scholars have further reinforced this orientation, clarifying that the essence of communicative translation is a "re-creation" process anchored in the target language culture and prioritizing reader comprehension. This theoretical orientation provides fundamental methodological support for tackling the highly complex task of translating long Japanese sentences.

Guided by the theory of communicative translation, to achieve effective information transfer, the translator must reorganize the long sentences of the original text. So, how should this reorganization process be carried out? As Ren Kaixing (2006) stated, "Any good article is built by the author word by word, sentence by sentence, paragraph by paragraph, and chapter by chapter according to a specific theme and a certain logical thread. Among these words, sentences, paragraphs, and chapters, there are interweaving and interdependent relationships that form a rigorous logical chain. The main task of a translator is to use logical reasoning to untangle the logical links in each section of the original work, and then 'assemble' them into a logical chain in the target language that fully conforms to the original thought." This view is equally applicable to the translation of Japanese long sentences. Due to the syntactic structure, word order, and cohesive features of Japanese long sentences, they often contain multiple layers of modification and implicit logical relationships. Therefore, when translating Japanese long sentences, it is even more essential to persistently focus on the logical chain for analysis and reorganization. By clarifying the semantic relationships and hierarchy of the various components within the sentence, the translator can reconstruct a logical thread in the target language that aligns with its idiomatic expression patterns, thereby achieving accurate and coherent information transmission. The author believes that the translation of Japanese long sentences should center on the logical chain and be carried out around the following three key dimensions. Together, they constitute the core operational strategies for realizing the purpose of communicative translation:

1. Logical deconstruction: Breaking free from the surface-level syntactic constraints of the original text, identifying and extracting its logical backbone, and then reconstructing the source language's logical chain based on that backbone.

2. Logical explicitation: Making the implicit logical relationships in the original text explicit in the translation through lexical and grammatical means.

3. Syntactic restructuring: Reintegrating the information according to the rhythmic and syntactic norms of the target language to construct a natural and fluent translation. These three strategies are interlinked, jointly serving the ultimate communicative goal of "enabling the target language readers to obtain a reading experience similar to that of the original language readers."

Translation Case Analysis

Regarding the translation strategies for Japanese long sentences, the author, guided by Communicative Translation Theory and analyzed through the lens of logical chains, proposes three strategies: “logical deconstruction, logical explicitation, and syntactic restructuring.” However, these three strategies are not isolated from one another but form an integrated whole and cannot be applied separately. In all the translation examples analyzed below, these three strategies are reflected, and each will be analyzed in turn with a focus on the application of individual strategies.

Logical Deconstruction

From a structural perspective, Japanese long sentences are often complex sentences composed of multiple clauses. Such sentences frequently constitute an entire paragraph in themselves, embedding a vast amount of information. How should one handle sentences of this kind? The author believes that clarifying their logic is of paramount importance. Every language possesses a certain degree of logicity to some extent, and this is especially true for a well-written text. However, while the original author shared a logical chain with the source language readers, this chain cannot be directly shared with the target language readers. Communicative Translation Theory emphasizes reader response and pursues functional “equivalence of effect.” Therefore, the translator must do their utmost to reproduce the original logical chain for the target language readers. Based on this, and in line with the “reader-oriented” requirement of Communicative Translation Theory, the author further proposes the strategy of sentence logical deconstruction. So-called “logical deconstruction” entails breaking free from the surface-level syntactic constraints of the original text, identifying and extracting its logical backbone, and then reconstructing the source language’s logical chain based on that backbone.

Example 1:

ST: しかし、今後、義務教育が複線化し、生まれたときから特権階級にいる人が小さいころから教育の場でもエリートとして扱われるとしたら、平等の概念をもたず、他人を見下すことを幼いころから覚えることになるわけで、自分は選ばれた人間だというエリート意識はより鼻持ちならないものになるのではないのでしょうか。(However, if compulsory education were to adopt a tracked system in the future, children from privileged backgrounds, raised in educational environments that treat them as elites from an early age, would fail to develop a concept of equality and would instead learn to look down on others. Wouldn't this elitist consciousness of being “chosen ones” likely make them even more insufferable?)

TT 1: 然而，今后，义务教育实行分轨制，自出生时起便处于特权阶级的人，从小在教育上被当做精英对待的话，就不会拥有平等的观念，同时因为从小养成瞧不起他人的习惯，产生了自己是被选中之人的精英意识，他们会变得更加令人讨厌吧。

TT 2: 然而，若未来义务教育实行分轨制，出身特权阶层的人自幼在教育环境中即被视为精英培养，他们将无从建立平等的观念，反而从小学会蔑视他人。这种“天选之人”的精英意识，恐怕会让他们变得更加令人反感吧。

Translation 1 adheres to the surface-level word order of the original text, attempting to directly map the long Japanese sentence structure onto Chinese. This leads to a core problem: scattered information distribution and blurred logical focus. Translation 1 presents “would not have a concept of equality” and “because they have been raised from childhood to...” as parallel statements, weakening the inherent causal and concomitant relationship between the “lack of equality concept” and “looking down on others” present in the original. At the same time, the final conclusion, “They would probably become even more unpleasant,” is placed at the end of the sentence. However, due to the excessive accumulation of information preceding it, the impact of this core judgment is

diluted, and the emotional focus is not prominent. How can this problem be solved? The author believes that logical deconstruction is a good strategy.

First, extract its logical backbone. Example 1 presents an inference and evaluative statement based on a hypothesis. Its core logic can be summarized as: (If the aforementioned situation takes place) This elitist mindset of regarding themselves as “chosen ones” will likely render them even more repugnant.

Second, identify and classify the supplementary information in the logical chain. The entire sentence follows “the logic of hypothesis → chain consequences → final result.” All content preceding the final result serves as the premises and reasoning steps leading to this evaluation.

Accordingly, the original long Japanese sentence can be deconstructed into four parts: Hypothesis A (義務教育が複線化し) + Hypothesis B (エリートとして扱われる) → Deduced Consequence C (平等の概念をもたず、他人を見下す) → Final Result D (鼻持ちならないものになる). This division clearly separates the two hypotheses (A and B), the deduced consequence C, and the final result D. As D marks both the logical endpoint and emotional focus of the sentence, it is defined as the logical backbone. Based on this logical chain, we can establish the basic structure for translation: If compulsory education adopts a tracked system in the future (Hypothesis A) and children are raised as elites (Hypothesis B), they will lack a sense of equality and grow up looking down on others (Consequence C), which ultimately makes them even more repugnant (Final Result D). After adding modifiers and other minor details to this framework, we can produce clearly structured Translation 2. The essence of logical deconstruction is to restore the original logical chain. A translation built on such a chain can fully convey the author’s intended message to target readers without any information loss. This aligns with the core principle of Communicative Translation Theory, which prioritizes readers’ comprehension.

Logical Explication

A logical chain ensures that no information is omitted from the translation, conveying the original author’s thoughts and emotions to the target language readers to the greatest extent possible, thereby making the translation a qualified one. However, Japanese long sentences are extremely complex. Due to their excessive length and the large amount of information they contain, if the original logic is not reorganized and highlighted, the readability of the translation will be diminished. The essence of logical explication is to make the thought process of the original text “visualized” and “signposted.” That is, based on the logical chain, the implicit logical relationships in the original text are made explicit in the translation through lexical and grammatical means. Through logical explication, the comprehension threshold for readers can be lowered, enhancing the reading experience and the persuasiveness of the text. From the perspective of the translation itself, it can strengthen structural rigor, layering, and convincing power. In this way, the goal of communicative translation—“prioritizing reader comprehension”—can be achieved.

Example 2:

ST: そのために、管理の基本的なやり方を身につけ、日常の職場でぶつかる問題を一つ一つ解決していくノウハウを具体的に書いているので、これを着実に進めていくことによって、だれでも容易に管理者として成功することができる。(To this end, this book not only explains the basic methods of management but also elaborates on practical techniques for handling everyday workplace issues. Once anyone thoroughly masters these methods and puts them into practice, they can easily grow into successful managers.)

TT 1: 为此, 本书具体介绍掌握基本管理方法的技巧和解决日常职场中常见问题的实操技巧, 按照书中方案切实推行, 无论是谁都可以轻松成为一个成功的管理者。

TT 2: 为此, 本书**不仅**讲解了管理学的基本方法, **还**具体阐述了应对职场日常问题的实操技巧。**只要**将这些内容**扎实掌握、外化于行**, 任何人都能轻松成长为一名成功的管理者。

Example 2 presents a clear logical chain: “To achieve A, the book introduces B and C; as long as one follows B and C, anyone can become A.” Based on this, the basic expression logic for the translation was derived: To this end, this book introduces techniques for mastering basic management methods and skills for handling common problems; by following the techniques in the book, anyone can become a successful manager. On this basis, Translation 1 was produced by filling in the details. Translation 1 presents all the information from the original text and is a qualified translation. However, its logical progression is linear and somewhat compact. Furthermore, the subject (the reader) of the key action, “conscientiously implementing the techniques outlined in the book,” is implicit, and its connection to the preceding phrase “introduces techniques” is somewhat abrupt. Together, these issues make the logical transition less smooth and affect the readability of the translation. Translation 2, by splitting the sentence and using connective phrases, constructs a stepped, clearly layered logical chain:

First Sentence (Elaborating Content and Structure): “To this end, this book not only explains the basic methods of management but also elaborates on practical techniques for handling everyday workplace issues.” Logical Explicitation 1: The use of “not only... but also...” clearly contrasts and juxtaposes the two parts of the content—“theoretical foundation” (basic methods) and “practical application” (practical techniques)—highlighting the composite and progressive nature of the book’s content.

Second Sentence (Pointing out the Path and Result): “Once you have thoroughly mastered them and put them into practice, anyone can easily grow into a successful manager.” Logical Explicitation 2: The use of the conditional compound sentence structure “Once... anyone can...” sets the “reader’s action” as a clear condition and the “successful result” as an inevitable inference, making the causal relationship explicit and powerful. Logical Explicitation 3: The action is refined into “thoroughly master them” (internal understanding) and “put them into practice” (external application), which is logically deeper and more complete than Translation 1’s “implementing the solutions.”

Translation 1 accurately conveys the basic information, but its logical presentation is relatively straightforward and flat. Translation 2, however, employs the strategy of logical explicitation. By restructuring the sentence patterns and selecting explicit connectives, it analyzes, reorganizes, and strengthens the expression of the original text’s inherent, tightly nested logical chain. This makes the reasoning process clearer and the argument more compelling, better aligning with the expectations of Chinese readers for expository text, thereby achieving the goal of communicative translation.

Syntactic Restructuring

Syntactic restructuring is a key output strategy under the guidance of Communicative Translation Theory, and its theoretical necessity is rooted in the differences between the Japanese and Chinese languages. Structures unique to Japanese long sentences, such as “pre-modification and predicate-final” constructions, if directly transplanted, will inevitably lead to verbose and awkward translations. This undermines the rhythmic beauty and reading fluency of Chinese, thereby obscuring the emotion and style of the original text, contradicting the principle of “achieving similar effect” pursued by communicative translation. When discussing the relationship between translation standards and sentence structure, Wu Deqing (2012) pointed out, “To achieve a level of

translation that is ‘smooth,’ at least two steps are required: First, accurately decompose the components of the Japanese sentence and appreciate the interrelationships among these components; then, reassemble them according to the customary word order of the Chinese language.” Therefore, to produce an excellent translation, in addition to logical explicitation, necessary adjustments in word order and phrasing are indispensable. Syntactic restructuring is by no means a mere formal adjustment. Rather, it is a reorganization of the original information based on the cognitive habits of the target language readers. It represents the ultimate, decisive step in ensuring the naturalness and readability of the translation, and ultimately in achieving an equivalent communicative effect.

Example 3:

ST: しかし、それよりも大切なことは、日常の対話や会合のなかで社会の出来事や事件をどう理解し、解釈するのか、またより良い社会づくりのため自分たちの問題として、どう考え、どのように行動すればよいかを一緒に考え合うことであろう。(However, what may be even more crucial is a shared reflection: how to comprehend social current events in our daily interactions and gatherings, and how to actively take responsibility, integrating thought and action to build a better society. This, precisely, is what we need to explore together.)

TT 1: 但是，比之更重要的是在日常对话与聚会中，我们应如何理解与阐释社会事件，另一方面，为了建设更美好的社会，我们又应如何将其视为己任，并思考与行动，大家共同对此进行探讨。

TT 2: 然而，更关键的或许在于一种共同的思考：如何在日常交流与集会中理解社会时事，又该如何为建设更好社会而主动承担、思行并举。这，正是需要我们共同探索的。

Translation 1 retains the single-sentence structure of the original—“general comment (what may be even more crucial)” followed by a “long object (the specific content).” The entire sentence becomes a heavy, unwieldy single clause with an overloaded ending, forcing readers to process a complex structure containing multiple layers of information in one go, which hinders comprehension. Furthermore, the original text carries a strong public and advocacy-oriented tone. It does not calmly describe a phenomenon but rather calls for collective, active civic participation and rational dialogue. The tone carries a sense of assertion and expectation, implied by the phrase “であろう” (probably...). In contrast, Translation 1 reads more like an operational guide or meeting minutes, focusing on clearly listing key points but lacking persuasive power.

Translation 2 accurately identifies the logical core of the source Japanese text as “一緒に考え合うこと” (shared reflection). By employing the strategy of syntactic restructuring, it advances this core to the beginning of the Chinese sentence, using it as the subject and thematic opener (“What may be even more crucial is a shared reflection”). This restructuring completely transforms the Japanese “back-heavy” structure into a Chinese “front-heavy” one, establishing the main idea first and then elaborating on it. Such an approach aligns with the Chinese cognitive habit of “getting straight to the point.” Furthermore, Translation 2 adopts the structure “a shared reflection: how to..., and how to...” The use of the colon tightly connects the general statement with its elaboration. The two “how to...” phrases are naturally expressed as appositive content of “reflection,” transforming the source text from a coordinate clause structure into a semantically natural enumeration. This integration of “reflection” and “its content” gives the translation greater cohesion and rhythm. Finally, through syntactic restructuring, Translation 2 adds the concluding statement, “This, precisely, is what we need to explore together,” forming a “general-specific-general” sentence structure. This makes the entire translation read more like a philosophical call to action rather than a mere restatement of the original sentence, successfully evoking the willingness of Chinese readers to engage in “shared reflection” and achieving the reader-response equivalence pursued by communicative translation.

Conclusion

This paper addresses the challenges of translating Japanese long sentences into Chinese. Guided by Peter Newmark's Communicative Translation Theory, it proposes a strategic framework centered on the "logical chain." This framework consists of three interconnected strategies: logical deconstruction, logical explicitation, and syntactic restructuring. For Japanese long sentences characterized by excessive modifiers, complex nested structures, and unclear logical focus, the appropriate application of logical deconstruction can clarify the inherent information hierarchy and context of the original text, laying a cognitive foundation for accurate translation. Logical explicitation involves explicitly restructuring Japanese long sentences, which often feature ambiguous linguistic expressions, thereby bridging the cognitive gap between the original author and the target language readers. Syntactic restructuring addresses the structural differences between Japanese and Chinese. By breaking free from the constraints of Japanese structures, such as "pre-modification and predicate-final" constructions, it reshapes the linguistic vehicle according to Chinese syntactic norms and expressive habits, producing natural and fluent translations. These three strategies sequentially address the entire translation process—from "accurately analyzing the original text" to "clearly converting the logic" and finally to "presenting the translation idiomatically." They transform the theoretical principles of communicative translation—"reader-centeredness and equivalence of effect"—into an operable practical pathway.

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