Comparative Study on Emphasis Embodied in Displacement and Conversion of Sentence Elements

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Abstract
The paper mainly makes comparison on Emphasis Structures in English and Chinese sentences and put forward insights of it. The paper firstly summarizes and makes contrastive analysis on two means to achieve emphasis in both English and Chinese languages—Displacement and Conversion, then probes into the underlying mechanism of the two means. At last, the paper provides practical suggestion from the preceding analysis on translation between English and Chinese.

Key words: Emphasis; Displacement; Conversion; Translation

INTRODUCTION

Language is a tool for the thinking to reflect reality. While the reflecting is initiative, dynamic, subjective, different language forms are used, from different angels and aspects, to make different analysis and synthesis on realities. Thus, different sentence patterns emerge.

Emphasis is a linguistic phenomenon that quantitatively exists both in English and Chinese languages. Different means to make emphasis can be categorized into Phonetic, Lexical, and Rhetoric means.

This paper analyzes and summarizes the means of emphasis in English and Chinese simple sentences from syntactic aspect, and explores the underlying causes of these means.

1. METHODS TO MAKE EMPHASIS IN ENGLISH AND CHINESE SENTENCES

1.1 Displacement

1.1.1 Backward Movement of Some Sentence Elements
English sentences have evolved certain kind of relatively fixed sequence of words and the gravity center of a sentence is, relatively, fixed. Normally, the information focus is placed at the end of an English sentence, which is called by linguists as Principle of End Focus (Zhang, 1993, p.1467). If a certain sentence element is moved from its normal place at the end of a sentence, an emphasis is formed. This phenomenon is called Backward Movement (B-movement).

In English simple sentences, most typical Backward Movements include Subject Backward-Movement and Object Backward-Movement.

(a) Subject Backward movement

In a SVP structure, if the subject is a noun clause, or infinitive structure, or –ing clause, it is often moved backwards and become the focus of a sentence.

Example 1:
It is not clear what caused the accident.
Example 2:
It doesn't matter whether we go together or separately.
Example 3:
It is vary kind of you to help me with the translation.
The Passive Voice can be viewed as a Subject Backward Movement. In a passive voice sentence, the action-executor is put at the end, thus become the information focus.
Example 4:
Telephone was invented by Graham Bell.

Example 5:
I was impressed by his words.

(b) Object Backward movement
In a sentence which has both direct object and indirect object, direct object is often more commonly put after the indirect object. This structure is symbolized as a SVIO structure. But if the speaker intends to emphasize the indirect object, it is moved backward to a place after the direct object, thus this structure is named SVOI.

Example 6:
He showed his friends his photos.

This sentence is usually used to answer the question "*What* did he show his friends?" and thus the gravity center is "photos". If this sentence is changed into SVIO structure "He showed his photos to his friends", the gravity center is changed into "his friends", and it is usually used to answer the question "*Who* did he show his photos to?"

Example 7:
Please explain to me what this means. (SVIO)

When we read this sentence, we understand that the direct object "what this means" is the most focused part, and that it appears at the end of the sentence goes in accordance with the Principle of End Focus. While in sentence "Please explain this to me", the direct object "this" is obviously not the focus of the speaker.

In Chinese language, there is also Backward Movement phenomenon.

(a) Predict Verb backward movement
In Chinese there are some sentence which are formed by using certain verbs as "把,将, 对, 管, 拿, 以……" to put objects ahead of the predicate verbs. By analyzing the semantic focus of these sentences, we can see that this special structure is used to emphasize the elements which are moved backward to the end of the sentences, such as the predicate verb, the adverbial modifier, the object complement or the indirect object in the sentence.

Example 8:
你把我们忘了. (compared with the sentence"你忘了我们", this sentence lay emphasis on the predicate verb "忘了")

Example 9:
将河水变清.（compared with the sentence "变清河水", this sentence lay emphasis on the object complement "清"）

Example 10:
诗人当即以一阕新词赠我。（compared with the sentence "诗人当即赠我一阕新词", this sentence lay emphasis on the indirect object "我".

"被"sentences (Passive voice structure)
Example 11:
他俩的话被老王听见了.

In this structure, action-executor "老王" is put after "被", thus moved from it usual theme position to the back of the sentence and become the information focus.

In some cases, the word "被" and the action-executor are neglected, thus ,the information focus falls on the predicate verb. See it in the following example:
Example 12:
桌子掀翻了, 窗户也打破了.This kind of sentence is called tacit"被"sentence.

1.1.2 Theme-Related Forward Movement
The beginning of a sentence is a starting point of information transaction, and the first element in a sentence is given a name as Theme. If any element normally appearing later in word order is moved to the beginning of a sentence and take the position of the Theme, this is called Theme-related Forward Movement, and which is another syntactic method to achieve emphasis.

In English, the most common Theme-related Forward Movement is the forward-movement of adverbs. We take inverted sentence as an example:
Example 13:
Reluctantly, she agreed to help.
Example 14:
Into the river she suddenly jumped.
Example 15:
Never before has our country been as united as it is today.
Example 16:
Glancing at the mirror she found a boy is following her.

This kind of Forward Movement of some other sentence elements includes: Object Forward Movement—Example 17. *A horrible mess* you've made./ Example 18. *Books*, he treasured from the earliest period of his life.

Subject Complement Forward Movement—Example 19. *Very strange* it seemed./ Example 20. *Keener and keener* the competition became.

Object Complement Forward Movement—Example 21. *Huddled in a corner of their kitchen* they found a puppy.

In Chinese language, there is also Theme-related Forward Movement phenomenon.

Object Forward Movement—
Example 22:
信已经写好了.（tacit "被" sentence）
Adverb Forward Movement—
Example 23:
每个周末她都去奶奶家.
Subject Complement Forward Movement—
Example 24:
真怪呀这事儿!
There are also some compound forward movement phenomena in Chinese:
Subject Complement and Adverb Forward Movement—

Example 25:

蓬头, 赤脚, 一边扣着纽扣, 几个还没睡醒的"懒虫"从楼上冲下来了（包身工）(Si, 2002).

The previously mentioned Passive Voice Structure can also be analyzed as a kind of Theme-related Forward Movement structure.

Example 26:

这部小说生动地反映了中国社会. Changed into passive voice structure, it goes like: 中国社会在这部小说中得到了生动的反映. In this sentence, both the forwardly moved object "中国社会" and the backwardly moved predicate "生动的反映" become the semantic focus.

1.2 Conversion

It is also very common for both English and Chinese languages to make conversion of sentence elements to achieve emphasis. As we can see in English Emphatic Pattern, "It-" cleft structure or "what-" cleft is used to convert the emphasized part to predictive. And In Chinese sentences, "是"、"就是" or "是……才" and other variants are put before the emphasized elements. Those elements such as subject, predict, adverbial modifier and object, all can be converted to predictive. Categorized analyses are put as follows:

1.2.1 Conversion of Subject

Example 27:

The child is adorable. ——→ It is the child that is adorable.

Chinese equivalence:

这孩子真可爱 ——→A. 这孩子才是真正可爱的.
　　　　　　 ——→B. 可爱的是这孩子.

So, in Chinese, Emphatic Pattern goes like "才是……的" or "……的是……" in which the link verb "是" is put before the emphasized subject "这孩子". Analyzed from its syntactic structure, this pattern can be viewed as a subjectless pattern, and in which the predictive "这孩子" is the emphasized part. See more examples:

Example 28:

海伦昨天在那里买了书——→是海伦昨天在哪里买了书.

1.2.2 Conversion of Predict

If the predict is intended to be emphasized, English applies "what-" cleft sentence while Chinese applies Emphatic Pattern—putting "是" in front of the predict.

Example 29:

I'm giving her a gift. ——→ "*What I'm doing* is giving her a gift."

我在给她礼物——→ 我是在给她礼物.

1.2.3 Conversion of Adverbial Modifier

Example 30:

They told the patient about his disease after his recovery.

——→*It was* after the patient's recovery *that* they told him about his disease.

在病人痊愈之后, 他们把病情告诉了他.

——→A. 他们告诉病人病情是在他痊愈之后.

——→B. 他们是在病人痊愈之后才告诉他病情的.

Example 31:

The accident took place at this crossroad. 事故在那个十字路口发生了.

——→A. *It was* at this crossroad that the accident took place.

——→A.事故就是在那个十字路口发生的.

——→B. This crossroad was where the accident took place.

——→B.那个十字路口就是发生事故的地方.

Example 32:

The partisans resisted the enemy stubbornly. 游击队员顽强地抵抗敌人.

——→ The *resistance* of the partisans against the enemy *was stubborn.*

游击队员对敌人的抵抗是顽强的.

In example 32, in both English and Chinese sentences, while the adverbial modifier was converted to predictive, the predict was converted to subject, thus to make an emphasized structure.

1.2.4 Conversion of Objects

Example 33:

He needs a good rest now. 他现在需要好好休息.

——→A. It is a good rest that he needs now. 他现在需要的是/就是好好休息.

——→B. What he needs now is a good rest. 好好休息才是他现在需要的.

In a double-objects sentence, either the direct object and indirect object can be converted to predictive when either of them is intended to be emphasized. We here reuse the previously used example sentence to illustrate this practice:

Example 6:

He showed his friends his photos.

——→A. *It is his photos* that he showed his friends. 他展示给朋友们看的是他的照片.

——→B. *What* he showed to his friends *is his photos.*

If we want to emphasize the indirect object "his friends", in English language there is only one Emphatic Pattern→ "It-" cleft structure can be used. In Chinese, "是" is put before the indirect object, but it is changed into manner adverbial.

He showed his friends his photos. ——→ It is his friends that he showed his photos to.

他展示照片是给朋友们看.

2. UNDERLYING MECHANISM OF DISPLACEMENT AND CONVERSION OF SENTENCE ELEMENTS

2.1 Underlying Mechanism of Displacement

According to Functional Linguistics, The function of language is to convey information. In communication,

applying emphasis is to arouse attention of the receiver upon certain information. The importance of information units is often related to the position of it in a sentence. In an English sentence, the information on the position of Rheme is usually more important, because it is the illustration of the Theme, and the Theme is "the starting point for the message", it is the already-known part in a sentence. Thus the Rheme conveys new information and it is the center of communication. Because "the Theme is the first constituent of the clause", the Rheme appears after it, that is why English language demonstrates a typical End-Weight phenomenon.

With the application of Displacement, sentence elements are moved backwards or forwards. The purpose of either way is to raise the importance of some certain information. If one element of a sentence is put on the position of the Rheme, it is considered important, and thus emphasized. We can see it from the preceding examples in part II-i-1. But in Theme-related Forward Movement, adverbs, objects, subject complements, or object complements are moved from their normally Rheme position to Theme position. This change of position also leads to an emphatic effect.

2.2 Underlying Mechanism of Conversion

In view of the theory that language is a tool of thought which mirrors reality, different language forms reflect the distinction of thought. In the process of conversion of sentence elements, subject, predicate, objects or adverbs in a sentence is converted to predicative, as in Emphatic Structure in English and "是…的" structure in Chinese. In this process, the thought reflects the reality from a static angle, the focus is to illustrate attributes, not dynamically present actions. In this case, the action is turned into state. And the emphasized part is put after the "be" verb. So we can interpret this predicative-conversion as: Since the state, character or attribute of a subject is always considered new message, SVP structure is applied in which the P—predicative provides messages of the subject and thus draw attention to the receiver.

3. SUGGESTION ON TRANSLATION BETWEEN ENGLISH AND CHINESE

The understanding of information focus in a sentence is important in conducting translation practice. From the preceding analysis, we can get to learn how to detect the focus in a sentence and how to feature it in the target language. In general, Rheme position and the predicative

are the centre of gravity in a sentence. So, in the following example.

Example 34:

We should create ourselves a better learning environment.

The focus is "a better learning environment ", so it's better to translate into Chinese "我们应该为自己创造的是更好的学习环境."

Example 35:

You don't grow the grain you eat and you don't make the clothes you wear.

In this sentence, the logic core is "don't grow" and "don't make", so when translated into Chinese, the equivalent phrases" "不是你种的" and "不是你做的" are put in the position of Rheme—"你吃的粮食不是你种的，你穿的衣服也不是你做的."

Example 36:

这消息对我来说是令人鼓舞的. The predictive "令人鼓舞的" is the logic core. So the English translation of this sentence is "The news was encouraging to me."

Example 37:

Atom differs in their atomic weights.

The Chinese equivalence can go like "各种原子的原子量是各不相同的", in which the predict "differs" is converted into predicative "各不相同的", thus its importance can be strengthened.

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