

Analyzing Chinese-to-Japanese Translation Through the Lens of Expressive Characteristics

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Abstract: The differences in expressive styles between Chinese and Japanese present challenges in achieving accurate and nuanced translation between the two languages. Relying solely on conventional translation techniques often fails to fully convey the intended meaning. By skillfully leveraging the structural and stylistic differences between Chinese and Japanese, translations can avoid excessive verbosity and unnatural phrasing, resulting in more fluent and precise renditions. This paper synthesizes prior studies on Chinese-to-Japanese translation and focuses on exploring the structural and expressive characteristics of the two languages. Using examples from textbooks, it examines the translation of Chinese complement constructions and the correspondence between Japanese thematic sentences, objective descriptive sentences, and their counterparts in Chinese. The study concludes by identifying unresolved issues in Chinese-to-Japanese translation that merit further investigation.

Keywords: Chinese-to-Japanese Translation; Advanced Translation Strategies; Syntactic Structure; Linguistic Expressiveness.

1. Introduction

The study of written translation has been largely learned, with myriad scholarly monographs and articles delving into its intricacies. However, the preponderance of research has gravitated toward Japanese-to-Chinese translation, with relatively scant attention devoted to Chinese-to-Japanese counterparts. While significant emphasis has been placed on techniques and lexical nuances, explorations grounded in expressive linguistic characteristics remain underrepresented. This paper endeavors to rectify this lacuna by foregrounding salient yet underexamined facets of Chinese-to-Japanese translation, leveraging empirical examples to proffer analytical insights and enhance the precision of Japanese language application.

2. Previous Literature Review on Chinese-to-Japanese Translation

The previous Literature Review on Chinese-to-Japanese Translation can be summarized to two aspects. The first is the research on the translation. The second is the research on the language's presentation.

2.1. Explorations in Translation Methodologies

Liu Jisheng's Research

Liu Jisheng (1997), in **Practical Techniques for Japanese-Chinese Translation**, postulated that polysemy and monosomy manifest as a dialectical unity, wherein even the most semantically polyvalent lexeme assumes a singular contextual meaning in situ.

Tao Zhenxiao's Research

Tao Zhenxiao (2001) articulated the paradigm of ***structural supplementation***, underscoring its predominance in syntactic recalibration during Japanese-to-Chinese translational processes.

Wu Kan's Research

Wu Kan (2005), in **Techniques and Practice of Chinese-Japanese Translation**, identified quintessential characteristics of Chinese expressions, including:

1). Prolific employment of quantifier structures, such as

“一+量词” (one + measure word), alongside plural forms like “一些” (some), frequently observed in critical discourse.

2). The pervasive deployment of adverbs such as “都” (all) and “很” (very).

3). The semantic polysemy of “要” (to want), a lexeme defying direct Japanese equivalence.

4). Rhetorical interrogatives employed not for inquiry but as vehicles for emphasis or negation.

5). Interrogative sentences can be used in non-interrogative contexts in two ways: The first is when a phrase containing an interrogative sentence is used as a single word. This usage corresponds between Chinese and Japanese.

The second is when two interrogative words are paired, expressing a complete negation of certain times, places, people, quantities, etc., effectively denying everything within a specific range. This usage exists in Chinese but does not correspond in Japanese.

6). Expressions like "some people" or "sometimes" are common. These should be placed at the end, and the most basic translations are "人がいる" or "ことがある," among others. Additionally, Japanese differs from Chinese in terms of writing style, use of loanwords, mimetic and onomatopoeic expressions, conjugations, sentence structure, tone, and nuance.

Xie Weiji's Research

Xie Weiji (2005) repudiated the notion of prescriptive translational dogma, asserting that "translation is devoid of absolutes or universal techniques." He advocated for the ***point-line connection method*** to optimize fidelity and fluency in Chinese-to-Japanese translation.

Zhang Jianhua and Gu Xueqian's Research

Zhang Jianhua and Gu Xueqian (2007), in **Advanced Chinese-to-Japanese Translation Course**, delineated advanced methodologies such as syntactic reordering, sentence condensation, and segmental parsing to enhance textual coherence.

2.2. Contrastive Analysis of Chinese and Japanese Expressive Modalities

Luo Xingdian's Research

Luo Xingdian (1985), in **Concise Japanese-Chinese Translation Course**, encapsulated the following grammatical disparities:

1).Structural Divergence: Chinese, as an isolating language, relies predominantly on word order for semantic delineation, whereas Japanese, an agglutinative language, employs particles and auxiliary verbs as syntactic anchors.

2).Morphological Inflection:Japanese verbs and adjectives exhibit multifaceted morphological variability, contrasting sharply with the morphologically static nature of Chinese.

3).Syntactic Configuration:Chinese adheres to an SVO (subject-verb-object) sequence, while Japanese predominantly employs SOV (subject-object-verb).

4). Politeness Hierarchies: Japanese places considerable emphasis on honorific and humble forms, a dimension absent in contemporary Chinese.

Wei Xiaoyang's Research

Wei Xiaoyang (2007) posits that both Chinese and Japanese cultures employ non-verbal methods, such as body language, as well as verbal strategies involving phonetics, vocabulary, grammar, and rhetoric, to create various forms of euphemistic expressions. This study analyzes the similarities and differences between euphemistic expressions in China and Japan from the perspectives of non-verbal and verbal methods. Verbal methods are categorized into four types:

1) Phonetic Methods

Pronunciation Characteristics

Kindaichi Haruhiko observes that Japanese features relatively few sounds produced by the lips, while sounds articulated within the oral cavity are more prevalent. In contrast, Chinese relies more on the teeth and tongue for articulation, with a wider range of oral movements.

Avoidance of Sounds

Euphemistic expressions employing phonetic methods involve avoiding certain words or sounds for auditory and visual effects. For example, Japanese speakers avoid voiced sounds, as they perceive these to evoke an impression of largeness and slowness.

2) Lexical Methods

Synonym Substitution

Both Chinese and Japanese have a wealth of synonyms, which, while referring to the same object, differ in emotional, stylistic, or tonal nuances. Substituting a synonym often makes otherwise inappropriate expressions more acceptable. Use of Antonyms

In Chinese, euphemisms often replace direct terms with their antonyms. For instance, “coffin” is referred to as “寿木” (longevity wood), and “refuse sales” is euphemistically expressed as “谢绝推销” (politely decline sales). Similarly, in Japanese, the term “お開きに” (to close) is used euphemistically during the conclusion of celebratory events.

Use of General or Abstract Terms

In Chinese, pregnancy is euphemistically referred to as “有喜了” (having happiness) or simply “有了” (having). Japanese employs similar expressions, such as “身ごもる” (to be with child).

Use of Polysemous Words

Polysemous words often create euphemistic expressions due to their broad contextual applicability and the varied, sometimes opposite, meanings they can convey. For instance, the Chinese word “了得” (liao de) can express opposite sentiments in different contexts, as in “这还了得!” (This is

intolerable!) versus “真了得!” (Truly remarkable!).

Expressions of Apology or Gratitude

Examples of euphemisms involving expressions of apology or gratitude include the Chinese “谢绝推销” (politely decline sales) and the Japanese “ごめん” (sorry), which serve as polite alternatives in certain contexts.

3) Grammatical Methods

Overall Differences in Euphemistic Expression

In Chinese, the predicate follows the subject, with the object placed at the end of the sentence. In Japanese, however, the predicate appears at the end, while the object precedes the verb. This syntactic structure allows Japanese speakers to modify and refine sentence endings based on the listener's preferences, achieving a more euphemistic tone. In contrast, Chinese syntax does not permit such flexibility, as the speaker's stance (affirmative, negative, supportive, or opposing) is conveyed immediately after the subject.

Differences in Particle Usage

In Chinese, particles are less significant compared to Japanese, where particles play a crucial role in grammatical structure. It could even be said that without particles, Japanese grammar would cease to exist.

Differences in Personal Pronouns

In Chinese, euphemisms can be created by replacing singular personal pronouns with their plural forms. For example, academic articles often use phrases like “我们觉得” (we think) or “我们认为” (we believe) to express a single author's opinion, conveying modesty and avoiding an assertive tone. In Japanese, personal pronouns are used more selectively, depending on the interpersonal relationship between the speaker and the listener. Only in contexts where both parties are of equal status or standing can personal pronouns be explicitly employed.

Differences in Auxiliary Verbs

Chinese lacks auxiliary verbs, whereas Japanese utilizes them extensively to achieve euphemistic expression. The use of auxiliary verbs in Japanese often softens the tone, avoiding an aggressive impression.

Differences in Modal Particles

Modal particles are unique to Chinese and serve as tools for euphemistic expression. Words like “吧” (ba), “呢” (ne), and “罢” (ba) can weaken the speaker's intent, avoid definitive statements, and make the expression more acceptable to the listener.

This analysis underscores the nuanced ways in which Chinese and Japanese differ in their use of phonetic, lexical, and grammatical methods to achieve euphemism.

3. Core Analysis

The aforementioned previous studies are beneficial for learning Chinese-Japanese translation; however, they are somewhat limited in scope. Research focusing on the characteristics of linguistic expression remains insufficient and lacks depth, leaving ample room for further exploration. This paper aims to conduct a preliminary analysis from the perspectives of sentence structure and linguistic expression characteristics.

3.1. Structural Disparities in Sentence Composition

Chinese is classified as an isolating language, characterized by a fundamental sentence structure comprising subject,

predicate, object, modifier, attribute, and complement. The syntactic roles of words in a sentence are determined predominantly by word order. In contrast, Japanese belongs to the agglutinative language family, where the functional roles of words are primarily indicated by particles and auxiliary verbs. The classification of sentence components in Japanese varies across grammatical theories. For instance, according to Takashi Masuoka, the basic components of Japanese sentences can be divided into four categories: predicate, modifiers (further subdivided into attributive and adverbial modifiers), supplementary elements, and topic markers. A defining feature of Japanese syntax is the placement of the predicate at the sentence's end, serving as its structural backbone. Consequently, complements in Chinese are often translated into adverbial modifiers in Japanese. For instance:

Chinese complements, such as "惊得目瞪口呆" (startled to the point of being dumbfounded) and "一身泥巴" (covered in mud), are typically rendered as adverbial modifiers in Japanese translations. For example:

The Chinese phrase "惊得目瞪口呆" is translated as "目を丸くして、驚いた" (staring with wide-open eyes in astonishment), where the complement becomes an adverbial modifier.

Similarly, "小孩子们在那里玩得一身泥巴" (the children played there and became muddy) is rendered in Japanese as "小さい子供たちはそこで泥んこになって遊んでいる" (the small children played there, becoming muddy).

Some verb-complement structures in Chinese, however, are translated into Japanese using an attributive + noun structure.

"领房产证的工本费、登记费竟高达 170 元" (the cost for obtaining property certificates and registration fees reached as high as 170 yuan) is rendered in Japanese as "不動産屋証明書の作成費、登録料がなんと 170 元という高額であった" (the creation fee and registration cost for the property certificate amounted to a significant 170 yuan).

Another example is "远处可以看到星星点点的人家灯火" (in the distance, one can see scattered lights from households), which is translated into Japanese as "遠く人家的の燈火が点々と見える" (the scattered lights of houses are visible in the distance).

3.2. Analyzing Chinese-to-Japanese Translation through Expressive Characteristics

3.2.1. Chinese Expressions Often Employ a Subject-Predicate Structure

For example:

- The phrase "门坏了" (the door is broken) in Chinese is translated into Japanese in two ways:

"ドアは壊れた" (the door, as the topic, is broken)

"ドアが壊れた" (the door broke).

Additionally, there is another expression in Japanese—"ドアは壊れてしまった" (the door, regrettably, has broken)—which conveys the speaker's emotions. However, this expression lies outside the current scope of discussion.

In Japanese, the first translation ("ドアは壊れた") uses "は" to mark "ドア" (door) as the topic, indicating it is the subject of discourse or commentary. The second translation ("ドアが壊れた") is generally classified as a "phenomenon

sentence" or an objective descriptive sentence, with the subject marked by "が." Notably, Chinese lacks this differentiation.

In Japanese, topic sentences are structured as follows:

"京都の紅葉很有名" (Kyoto's autumn leaves are famous) becomes "京都の紅葉は有名です" (Kyoto's autumn leaves are famous).

Here, the part before "は" represents the topic of discussion, while the predicate conveys the speaker's judgment or description. Such sentences typically pose no translation difficulties.

Objective descriptive sentences, however, require more attention. For example:

"啊，下雨了" (Ah, it's raining) is translated as "あら、雨が降ってきましたね" (Ah, it has started to rain).

"小野，这箱子好重啊！" (Ono, this suitcase is so heavy!) becomes "小野さん、ずいぶん重そうなスーツケースですね" (Mr. Ono, that suitcase looks quite heavy).

"这路好直啊！" (This road is so straight!) is rendered as "ずいぶんまっすぐな道路ですね" (That road is very straight).

The above examples are taken from practical texts in *Standard Japanese*. In these cases, the sentences express the speaker's observation and faithfully describe what they see, with the subject marked by "が." It is noteworthy that examples are noun-based sentences without explicit subjects. When translated into Chinese, they can be rendered as "好重的一个箱子啊！" (a very heavy suitcase!) or "好直的一条路啊！" (a very straight road!). Alternatively, they may be translated as "看来你的箱子好重啊！" (it seems your suitcase is very heavy!) or "这条路好直啊！" (this road is really straight!). Such Chinese subject-predicate structures are often rendered into Japanese as noun sentences when conveying the speaker's exclamation.

3.2.2. Human-Centric Expressions in Chinese vs. Objective Descriptions in Japanese

Chinese tends to express events from a human perspective, while Japanese emphasizes objective states. For instance, the Chinese phrase "门打不开" (the door cannot be opened) means "someone is unable to open the door," focusing on the human effort. In Japanese, however, "ドアが開かない" (the door does not open) describes the door's objective condition.

Consider the following example:

"自从小孩子出生后，不要说睡午觉了，就连晚上睡眠的时间也缩短了" (since the child was born, not to mention napping, even nighttime sleep has been reduced).

This sentence is translated into Japanese as "子供が生まれてからというもの、昼寝どころか、夜寝る時間も縮められた" (since the child was born, not to mention naps, even the time for nighttime sleep has been curtailed).

This example, taken from *Comprehensive Japanese Textbook Vol. 5*, reflects an accurate translation, leaving little room for critique. However, if the Chinese sentence were phrased as "我自从生了孩子后，不要说睡午觉了，就连晚上睡眠的时间也缩短了" (since I gave birth to my child, not to mention napping, even nighttime sleep has been reduced), the translation would likely remain the same.

In Japanese, childbirth is not portrayed as an outcome of human effort but rather as a natural, life-sustaining process akin to fruit ripening or water flowing. This perspective lends

a sense of logic to Japanese expressions.

Japanese expressions, such as "待遇表現" (politeness expressions), are also highly distinctive and merit careful attention during Chinese-to-Japanese translation. Similarly, the use of personal pronouns in Chinese is significantly more frequent than in Japanese, necessitating meticulous consideration during translation.

4. Conclusion

The above discussion and analysis of Chinese-to-Japanese translation focus on differences in sentence structure and the dichotomy between thematic and objective descriptive expressions. Given the disparities in expressive modalities between the two languages, relying solely on translation techniques may fail to capture the full depth of meaning. Skillfully leveraging the divergent expressive features of Chinese and Japanese can help produce translations that avoid unnecessary verbosity or awkward phrasing. To this end, translators must gain a nuanced understanding of these differences and employ them in conjunction with other strategies to achieve more accurate, fluid, and effective translations.

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