

A Comparison of Chinese and French Language Structures

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Abstract: The comparative study of two languages can have many angles, such as phonetic comparison, lexical comparison, semantic comparison, grammatical comparison and so on. Chinese and French are commonly used languages in the United Nations. Among them, French belongs to the Latin language family and is an independent language of the Romance language family of the European Indo-European language family; Chinese belongs to the Sino-Tibetan language family and is one of the oldest scripts in the world with a history of more than 6,000 years. Among them, French belongs to phonograms, and Chinese belongs to ideograms, which means that there are big differences in the syntactic structure of the two languages. The author studied French systematically at the undergraduate level. When I first came into contact with the French language, the most intuitive feeling was the difference between pronunciation and vocabulary. This paper discusses the structural and phonetic differences between Chinese and French from five aspects: phonetics, inverse linearity and forward linearity, meaning and form, the concept of aspect, and subject and object.

Keywords: Comparison of Chinese and French Language Structures; Differences; French Learning.

1. Introduction

Most students in China will spend most of their time and energy on memorizing words when learning a foreign language, and because of the influence of the general environment, most foreign language teachers emphasize the importance of words, so students usually have this illusion, I think that as long as I master the words well, it is equivalent to mastering a foreign language. But such an understanding often results in the fact that even though you have mastered a lot of words, you still have obstacles in understanding and expressing them. The author believes that the memory of words is the foundation, but if the language structure and phonetic differences between Chinese and French are ignored, there will be no effect of getting twice the result with half the effort. Because we all know that the composition of a sentence must follow certain syntactic requirements, not just a list of vocabulary. When we express our thoughts and emotions in a foreign language, if we ignore the syntactic structure and its unique pronunciation characteristics of the foreign language, coupled with the influence of our mother tongue, we will speak the so-called Chingo-French. For example, beginners often make such mistakes: say *je suis fatigué* as *J'ai fatigué*; when expressing that I have already eaten, say it as *Je mange* (I am eating); Will make mistakes like: "You are beautiful, I am hungry" and so on.

This article attempts to summarize the main differences in Chinese-French language structure and phonetics from the experience of learning French at the undergraduate level, combined with the research on Chinese at the graduate level, hoping to provide reference for the majority of domestic students when learning French.

2. French Phonetics and Chinese Phonetics

French has 16 vowels, 17 consonants, and 3 semi-vowels, and the vowels are all monophonic, without distinction of length. Chinese vowel finals consist of 10 single finals, 13

compound finals and 15 nasal finals. Composed of 22 consonants. In addition, there is a special consonant "uvula" [r] in French, and its pronunciation method and pronunciation position are not found in Chinese. The French voice is impressive in that every phoneme is clear, crisp and loud. This is not unrelated to the fact that the basic part of French pronunciation is mainly located in the front of the mouth. French people tense their oral muscles when they pronounce, while Chinese pronunciation mainly relies on the front of the mouth with loose muscles. Therefore, people think that the French have strict pronunciation requirements. Chinese people are careless when they pronounce it.

There are also great differences in the syllables of Chinese and French phonetics. Chinese syllables can be analyzed into three parts: initials, finals, and tones. The first sound is the initial consonant, the rest is the final, and the tone is the pitch of the whole syllable. The reason why the tones are also regarded as a part of the syllable is because the tones in Chinese are differentiated. For example, the initials of the four characters "Wang, Wang, Wang, and Wang" are all [w], and the finals are all [ang]. Just because the tone is different, the meaning is different, and it is written as 4 different characters in writing. Therefore, tones in Chinese are the symbols of syllables, and there are four tones: "Yinping, Yangping, Shangsheng, Qusheng".

In French, vowels are the marks of syllables, and most syllables end with vowels, such as the syllables of the following French sentences: *Je/l'en /ten/dais/ ve/nir/ a/vec/ sec/ gros/sabots* (I saw through his intentions at a glance). French syllables are usually composed of one (sometimes two) consonants plus a vowel, such as the word *professeur* (teacher) is composed of three syllables [pr /fe/so:r]. Linguist Walter Von Wartburg once made statistics on the ratio of open syllables to closed syllables in French, and the result is: in a prose page, the ratio of open syllables to closed syllables in French is 5:1, The soul of a syllable resides in the vowels. An important rule in the pronunciation of French words is that the stress falls on the last syllable.

The difference in pitch system between Chinese and French

is concentrated in the fact that Chinese is a tonal language with no stress phenomenon, and four tones are used to distinguish different words. In French, there is no tone, only stress, and the stress generally falls on the last syllable of a word. The combination of stress and intonation forms a rhythm with high and low, strong and weak, which gives people a sense of music. This is why French is like a song.

3. French Forward Linearity and Chinese Reverse Linearity

Saussure pointed out in "General Linguistics Course" that language symbols, as signifiers, have linear characteristics. This feature is unfolded in time, and it first embodies a length, and this length can only be measured in one direction as a line. According to this basic characteristic of language symbols, when we examine the two languages of Chinese and French, we will find that although Chinese and French still follow the basic characteristics of language symbols, that is, both have linear characteristics, the extension directions of the two are opposite. Chinese has reverse linear features, while French has forward linear features. For example:

- 1) I run.
- 2) I am running on the playground.
- 3) I run on the playground every Sunday.
- 4) I run with my friends on the playground every Sunday.

The French translation is:

- 1) Je cours.
- 2) Je cours sur le terrain.
- 3) Je cours sur le terrain de jeu tous les dimanches.
- 4) Je cours sur le terrain de jeu avec mes amis tous les dimanches.

Through the comparison of the above Chinese and French example sentences, we can more intuitively see the linear development direction of the Chinese and French language structures. And how does our comparison help ordinary language learning? For example, we can use this as a basis to better understand why Proust can write sentences that are one page or even longer, which is French. It is determined by the characteristics of the sentence structure. French long sentences can be modified and limited on the basis of the main clause by relative clauses, prepositional structures or participle structures, etc., and can be extended linearly. Such sentences are unimaginable in Chinese.

The inverse linear feature of Chinese makes it appear in the specific language form: there are many flowing sentences in Chinese, one short sentence after another, explaining point by point with short sentences, and unfolding the problem layer by layer. Only when we have a deep understanding of the obvious differences between Chinese and French languages can we switch freely between the expressions of the two languages. We have seen that long sentences in French can be expressed by dividing them into short sentences according to meaning groups; while expressing in French, you can gradually learn to use various structures (clauses, participles, prepositional structures, etc.) More idiomatic French expressions.

4. Meaning and Shape

French is a phonetic text, so it pays more attention to the change of form, which is the so-called Xinghe. I believe that those who have been in contact with French have a deep understanding of this point at the level of pronunciation and vocabulary, such as the change of gender and number of

nouns, and the change of tense of verbs. In this paper, we discuss the form-cohesion in French grammatical structure. The grammatical combination of French is reflected in the logical relationship between words and words, phrases and phrases, sentences and sentences through various logical connectives. In comparison, Chinese does not pay so much attention to form, but mainly embodies its logical relationship through the meaning contained in the context. That is to say, for example:

- 1) No, no cooperation.
- 2) Things are cheap here, but services are expensive.

We can see that in the above two sentences, Chinese is very concise and only separated by punctuation marks, but we can still judge the semantic and logical relationship before and after the comma according to the context. However, in most cases in French, it is necessary to use conjunctions, prepositions and prepositional phrases to express the logical relationship between the two clauses clearly. It can be said that the French Xinghe system is very developed, which is also a very headache for French learners. For example, there are many prepositional phrases expressing reasons: cause, de grace, en raison de, force de, la suite de... In addition, there are conjunctions expressing reasons: puisque, comme, parce que, car... and many others. Logical relations: condition, concession, juxtaposition, turning point, opposition, purpose... There are many kinds of conjunctions or prepositions (phrases) that need to be learned and memorized when expressing each logical relation. The author believes that although these words expressing logical relations are complex, the most likely situation is that we still do not have enough understanding of the linguistic characteristics of French, which leads to the fact that after learning various logical conjunctions, we are influenced by our mother tongue (Chinese). Influence, without conscious and active use of these words.

5. The Concept of Aspect in French and Chinese

Linked with the form-fit feature of French, the concept of time in French is also reflected through the form change of verbs. But the conjugated form of a verb in French can not only reflect the concept of time, but also reflect the mode and aspect. In addition to verb conjugations, there are many forms in French. Modes express the tone of speech. There are six modes in French: indicative, conditional, subjunctive, participle, infinitive and imperative. The usage of the mode is relatively intuitive, and the conjugated form of any verb includes three aspects: tense, mode and aspect. Even a very simple indicative present is the same, such as: Je lis, which expresses the present in time, indicative in mode, and imperfect (or progressive) in aspect. In daily French learning, people often only focus on the tense, while ignoring the concept of "aspect". This may be because when French and Chinese express the concept of time, Chinese verbs do not have inflections, so French beginners are particularly impressed by the word conjugation. But if the "aspect" is ignored, it is actually impossible to use French verbs correctly. There are two types of "aspect" in French, one is the verb aspect and the other is the tense aspect. The aspect of the verb and the aspect of the tense need to be used together, and when the two are inconsistent, the aspect of the verb must be subordinate to the aspect of the tense. Simply put, the concept of "body" reflects whether the action expressed by a verb has been completed. Therefore, we can simply divide the "aspect"

into perfect and incomplete. Some verbs in French contain a very short duration of time, and the action is completed as soon as it occurs, such as: *entrer, se lever, sasseoir, arriver*, etc. Such verbs are often used in conjunction with the tense expressing the perfect aspect.

And some verbs themselves contain a very long length of time, such as *etre, avoin*, etc., such verbs often need to be used in conjunction with the tense expressing the imperfect aspect, and there are many verbs whose "aspect" can be either perfect or perfect Unfinished, their body depends on *lire, dormir, manger, rire*.

The concept of tense is not mentioned in Chinese, but there is the concept of aspect. The aspect of Chinese is not reflected by the conjugation of verbs, but by the context or some function words. The common function words are finished, let and so on. For example: I ate, such a sentence needs to correspond to *J'ai mange* in French, not *je mange*. In addition, in Chinese, result complements can be added to indicate the result, such as: finished, good, lost and understood, etc. These words can also be used to form the perfect state. For example: She finally understood what I said. After he finished speaking, he walked out of the classroom with his homework. According to the past learning experience, the author found that the concept of body is often ignored by many students in the learning process.

6. Subject and Object

In the learning stage of elementary French, I believe there is a sentence that impresses everyone, that is: *tu me manges*, we translate it in Chinese as: I miss you. However, although the translation is over and the meaning is clear, it is always difficult to apply it freely when speaking. The reason is that the subject and object are inverted in Chinese and French. That is to say, the subject I in Chinese becomes the object in French; on the contrary, the object "you" in Chinese becomes the subject in French. The subject is the implementer of the action in a sentence, and the object is the receiver of the action in a sentence. In the two languages of Chinese and French, the above-mentioned themes are often encountered.

The inconsistency between the subject and the object, the difference in sentence structure, actually reflects the difference in the way of thinking of the speakers of the two languages. Therefore, a clear distinction between subject and object is very necessary to master authentic French. We divide such subject-object inversion situations into two broad categories:

(1) Active voice and passive voice

Both Chinese and French languages have active voice and passive voice. The difference is that the passive voice is more

commonly used in French than in Chinese. In Chinese, the passive voice is only used when the passive meaning is particularly emphasized. Knowing this, when the two languages are converted, the subject and object of the two languages must be inverted in terms of grammatical structure. For example: *Elle est aime de tout le monde*. If the words and words are converted into Chinese, it is: she is loved by all people. Although the meaning is not wrong, it is not very consistent with the expression habits of Chinese. Therefore, we can reverse the subject and object of the two languages, that is: everyone Everyone loves her.

(2) fixed word expression

There are many more words in French like the *manquer* we mentioned above. Such as *plair, echopper, sembler, venir* and so on. Examples are as follows:

J'aime cette fille. I like this girl.

Le courage me manque. I lack courage.

Des mots m'chappent. I can't remember some words.

Il me semble que... I think

Une ide mest venu. I had an idea.

In the above example sentences, the conversion of subject and object is required in the conversion of Chinese and French languages.

We compared the structural differences between Chinese and French languages from four aspects: phonetics, reverse linearity and forward linearity of sentences, meaning and form, concept of aspect, and subject and object. We must learn to grasp the language differences at the sentence level, appreciate the differences in the way of thinking contained in different languages, express in more authentic French, and better convert between the two languages.

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