

# On Translation Strategies of Chinese Run-on Sentences under Translation Variation Theory

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**Abstract:** The study of run-on sentences is one of the hot topics in contemporary Chinese linguistic research. Professor Zhao Yuanren's concept of "mini sentence is fundamental" explains the reason for the prevalence of run-on sentences in Chinese, touching upon the essence of Chinese expression. Guided by Translation Variation Theory, this article takes the translation practice of the *Biography of Li Yanlu*, the first chapter of *Biographies of Historical Figures of the CPC in Mudanjiang* as an example to explore translation strategies for Chinese run-on sentences through methods such as addition and adaptation.

**Keywords:** Chinese Run-on Sentences; Translation Variation Theory; Addition; Adaption.

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## 1. Introduction

Since Professor Lv Shuxiang put forward the concept of run-on sentences in the late 1970s, the domestic linguistic community has conducted extensive and in-depth research on various aspects of run-on sentences, such as their characteristics, classification, and English-Chinese translation. Regarding the implicit logical relationships and formation mechanism of run-on sentences in Chinese, most Chinese scholars adopt a perspective based on the comparison between Chinese and Western languages and cultures, seeking explanations for differences in lexicology, syntax, modes of thought, and traditional culture. For example, Gao Mingkai discusses from a cultural and cognitive perspective, suggesting that Chinese sentences resemble atomic nuclei, where numerous pieces of information are gathered. Despite the lack of logical connectives between sentences, people can still understand the underlying semantic relationships within them. Based on the differences in syntactic structures between English and Chinese, Shen Xiaolong believes that the reason for the formation of run-on sentences in Chinese is the absence of a subject-verb structure like that in Indo-European languages. Lian Shuneng's research from the perspective of English-Chinese language comparison suggests that the main reason for the formation of run-on sentences is that Chinese sentence construction mainly follows the narrative style of run-on water, where language users often use multiple clauses to describe the thinking process layer by layer. Xu Siyi argues that the main reason for the formation of run-on sentences lies in the fact that semantic expression in Chinese primarily relies on logical semantic structures, word combinations, and linguistic contexts. Some scholars also propose that run-on sentences in spoken language originate from Classical Chinese written language, and the ability of Chinese phrases to function as sentences is a major factor in the formation of run-on sentences.

Although scholars have to some extent pondered the semantic relationships within run-on sentences and noted that the greatest difference between English and Chinese lies in English's morphosyntactic features and Chinese's semantic features, further research is needed from a typological perspective on the mechanisms of run-on sentence formation and the semantic relationships between clauses within run-on sentences. Liu Danqing emphasizes that studying the

syntactic features of Chinese requires an awareness of both language universals and language typology and that the linguistic characteristics of Chinese should be understood and studied within the broader context of human language universals and typological classifications. Lv Shuxiang points out that to understand the characteristics of Chinese, one must compare it with non-Chinese languages. Therefore, taking the *Biography of Li Yanlu*, the first chapter of *Biographies of Historical Figures of the CPC in Mudanjiang*, published by the Chinese Communist Party History Publishing House in 2015 as an example, this paper comprehensively discusses the translation strategies for run-on sentences in Chinese from the perspectives of morphological, syntactic, and subject types.

## 2. Review of Translation Variation Theory Achievements

In this article, the translator chooses Professor Huang Zhonglian's Translation Variation Theory with distinctive Chinese characteristics, as the guiding framework. This approach has opened a fresh research path and facilitated dialogue and integration of Eastern and Western thoughts. As the result of the project of the National Social Science Foundation, the Translation Variation Theory, written by Professor Huang Zhonglian, is an innovative research achievement. It is of great significance to the study of translation theory in China and the translation practice in the new era. (Huang Zhonglian, 2002: 5) Full translation and variant translation are a pair of new translation categories. In the traditional category of translation, full translation has always played a dominant role. The difference between the two types of translation lies in the degree of preservation of the content and form of the original text. From the mainstream point of view, their common characteristics are the preservation of meaning and form, and the whole translation process is a preservation movement. (Huang Zhonglian, 2022: 21) As human cultures exchange more frequently and deeply, such translation strategies may also encounter limitations. To break through this limitation, Professor Huang Zhonglian put forward the concept of "variant translation", which refers to the translator according to the special needs of specific readers under specific conditions.

The translator refers to CNKI journal papers for reference. Among them, there are 701 academic journals, 660 theses,

including 21 doctoral theses and 639 master theses, 9 domestic conferences and 9 international conferences, and 3 Chinese books with the theme of Translation Variation Theory. There are 266 academic journals, 466 academic dissertations, 4 domestic conferences, and 7 international conferences about the theme of Translation Variation Theory. One of the articles closely related to this topic, such as Shao Lu's *Philosophical Reflection on Contemporary Chinese Translation Discourse: A Case Study of Translation Variation Theory*, points out that the Translation Variation Theory is mainly a refinement of the concept of "partial translation" and focuses on the induction of translation methods. Translation Variation Theory can be used as the research object for constructing a theory, and its philosophical thinking is also worth exploring. (Shao Lu, 2022: 136) Liu Ying points out in her article *On the Translation Variation* published in the Journal of Tsinghua University that "variant translation" seems to be only a flexible method and strategy, but it is a re-construction of context in the process of literary translation. This kind of "variant translation", which integrates differences and similarities, is a reconstruction and derivation of textual meaning. It achieves linguistic and cultural integration through the form of "creative rebellion". (Liu Ying, 2019: 98) Li Jing and Tu Guoyuan point out in their article *Readership and Adaption in the Translating of Tourism Promotional Texts* that variant translation is a kind of translating action that conforms to the needs of readers and has a strong purpose. Compared with the full translation, the variant translation of necessary information can observe the appeal points of international tourists' reading interests, and show Chinese tourism resources to foreign tourists with a better reception effect. (Li Jing, Tu Guoyuan, 2016: 53)

### 3. Translation Case Analysis

The flowing structure of Chinese sentences reflects the clear and smooth logical coherence in the thinking of the Chinese. (Shen Xiaolong, 1988: 2) Scholars have identified a special type of compound sentence in Chinese, that lacks coordinating conjunctions and features loosely connected semantics between sentences. This unique structure, absent in the framework of Indo-European compound sentences, highlights an essential characteristic of the Chinese language, referred to as "run-on sentences" by scholars. Inspired by Lv Shuxiang's emphasis on the role of the subject in the classification of compound sentences, this paper attempts to reclassify Chinese run-on sentences base on subject designation from the perspective of their essential features. Depending on whether the subjects of their segments are the same or not, run-on sentences can be roughly categorized into two major groups: single-subject and multi-subject. In this paper, under the guidance of Translation Variation Theory, we will take these two types of sentences as the starting point for translation research.

#### 3.1. Addition of Single-Subject Run-on Sentences

The single-subject flowing sentence has a common subject for all sentence segments, and the subject is usually omitted, and its structural form can be abstracted as  $SP_1+(S) P_2+(S) P_3+.....+(S)P_n$ . (Wang Wenbin, Zhao Chaoyong, 2017: 39) Chinese focuses on parataxis uses fewer grammatical morphology changes and lexical connections, and has short and loose sentence structures. At the same time, Chinese

emphasizes the function and meaning of the language, and readers need to rely on context and logic to understand the meaning of what the author wants to express. On the contrary, English emphasizes hypotaxis, grammatical completeness, tight sentence structure, long sentences, and clear logic. Therefore, in the process of translating single-subject run-on sentences into English, the translator selects the Translation Variation Theory to supplement the implicit information, clarify the logical structure between the sentences and paragraphs, and cover the scattered sentences in Chinese with a complete sentence structure.

#### Example 1

**Source text:** 李述义是位游医，常年在外以行医为生，兼或为有钱人家打理帐目补贴家用。

**Target text:** Li Shuyi was a doctor who didn't have a fixed clinic. He made a living by practicing medicine outside all year round, and also managed the accounts of the rich family to subsidize his family.

**Analysis:** Run-on sentences are not complete with both subject and predicate. In these kinds of sentences, several different verbs state the same subject or the same verb dominates several complements or clauses, and clauses contain clauses. (Xu Siyi, 2002: 10) Firstly, the original text is composed of three clauses, which are the introduction of Li Yanlu's father. The verbs in these three clauses are grammatically governed by the same subject "李述义", which conforms to the sentence structure of single-subject run-on sentences. Secondly, in the translation process, the translator renders "李述义是位游医" as a standalone sentence. Guided by the Translation Variation Theory, the translator selects the additional translation method to translate "游医" into "a doctor who didn't have a fixed clinic", highlighting the flexibility and mobility of this profession. The translation not only accurately conveys the meaning of the original text at the linguistic level but also provides readers with clearer and more specific descriptions, helping readers to better understand the meaning expressed in the original text. Finally, the translator consolidates "常年在外以行医为生" and "兼或为有钱人家打理帐目补贴家用" into a compound sentence, highlighting the hardships faced by "李述义". This enhances the depth of the characterization, making the translation more vibrant and elevating the overall quality of the text.

#### Example 2

**Source text:** 王德林采纳了李延禄的建议，派副总指挥孔宪荣去交涉处理，制止了一场抗日军内部的武装冲突。

**Target text:** Wang Delin adopted Li Yanlu's suggestion and sent deputy commander Kong Xianrong to peacefully negotiate and deal with the tragedy of Pingyang Town, which stopped an armed conflict within the resistance against Japanese aggression army.

**Analysis:** In the source text, the subject is "王德林", and this subject governs three Chinese verbs "采纳", "派", and "制止". Therefore, it can be determined that this sentence is a run-on sentence with a single subject. When dealing with the translation difficulties of Example 2, firstly, the translator treats the first two clauses as a compound sentence. The Chinese verbs "采纳" and "派" act as predicates, connected by the coordinating conjunction "and" to highlight the sequential nature of the events. However, since the original text implies "李延禄的建议" is "采取和平处理的方法", the

translator adds the adverb “peacefully” to modify “negotiate”. Secondly, “交涉处理” refers to the “平阳镇惨案” mentioned in the original text. Under the Translation Variation Theory, the translator uses the addition method to translate this term. This approach enhances the clarity of the translation and ensures the completeness of expression, enabling readers to gain a clear understanding of the content. Liu Ying points out that based on the context, the translator can supplement necessary content in the translation, using the specific method of filling in semantics, making implicit explicit, and connecting meanings to achieve semantic clarity and expressions by conventions. (Liu Ying, 2019: 96) Finally, in handling the third Chinese verb “制止”, it is treated as a non-restrictive relative clause introduced by “which”, emphasizing the outcome achieved after the “交涉处理”. This approach ensures that readers have a clear and thorough understanding of the logical relationship conveyed in the original text.

### 3.2. Adaption of Multi-Subject Run-on Sentences

Multi-subject run-on sentences usually contain more than two subjects and show the characteristics of subject alternation, subject omission, and cross-sentence segment designation. Its sentence segment structure can be abstracted as  $S_1P_1+S_2P_1+S_1P_2+S_2P_2+\dots+S_1P_n+S_2P_m$ . (Wang Wenbin, Zhao Chaoyong, 2017: 40) Multi-subject run-on sentences are more complex than single-subject run-on sentences, with subject inconsistency in each sentence segment, diversified predicate verbs, and no obvious subject-subordinate distinction. Thus, the form is looser and has certain translation difficulties. Therefore, the translator chooses the adaptation method, which is guided by the Translation Variation Theory to translate this kind of sentence. Adaptation is a kind of variant translation activity that changes the form or part of the original work or even the style of the original work according to specific requirements. (Huang Zhonglian, 2002: 149) Adaptation is applied to the syntactic level and can be realized through a variety of syntactic reconstruction methods such as shift reconstruction and syncopated reconstruction. All these ways can be regarded as the derivation of adaptation means.

#### Example 3

**Source text:** 宁安收复后，为推动绥宁地区义勇军各部联合抗日，李延禄按照中共绥宁中心县委的指示，建议王德林召开了一次参战各部义勇军联席会议，自卫军总司令李杜也派代表参加了会议。

**Target text:** After the recapture of Ning'an, to enhance the coordinated resistance against Japanese aggression among different divisions of the Suining Volunteer Army, Li Yanlu proposed that Wang Delin convene a united meeting of the participating Volunteer Army in line with the directives of the Suining Central County Committee of the CPC. Li Du, the commander in chief of the Self-Defense Army, also dispatched representatives to attend the meeting.

**Analysis:** The original text in Example 3 consists of multiple language units of varying sizes, with no connecting conjunctions. The coherence relies entirely on semantic cohesion, aligning with the linguistic features of a run-on sentence in Chinese. The source text contains two subjects, namely “李延禄” and “李杜”. The predicate verbs corresponding to “李延禄” are “按照” and “建议”, and the predicate verb corresponding to “李杜” is “派”. This sentence conforms to the linguistic structure of a run-on sentence with

multi-subjects in Chinese. In the process of translation, guided by the Translation Variation Theory, the translator employs the method of adaption to address translation challenges. This involves breaking down complex sentences, providing explanations for specific terms, and adjusting the word order for better clarity. Adaptation aims at making changes in the original work in content or forms through alteration to adapt to the historical, cultural, and social context of the country where the translation is made and to meet the needs of the readers of the translated language. (Huang Zhonglian, Yang Guangrong, 2015: 51) Firstly, due to the presence of two subjects in the original text and to avoid logical confusion, the translator splits the lengthy sentence into two separate sentences, with “李延禄” and “李杜” each serving as the subject. This alteration modifies the organizational structure of the source text, reconfiguring the sentence style. Secondly, when translating sentence by sentence, the “抗日” is translated as “resistance against Japanese aggression” instead of choosing “anti-Japanese”. The English prefix “anti-” is followed by a compound word composed of ethnicity or people, often paired with irrational and emotional events or behaviors. “Anti-Japanese” means “against Japan”, and does not contain information such as “invasion”. However, “resistance” contains a very positive connotation, so choosing this word is more appropriate. Finally, due to “李延禄建议王德林召开了一次参战各部义勇军联席会议” containing the main information when translating the first sentence with “李延禄” as the subject, the translator selects “建议” as the predicate verb. The Chinese verb “按照” is treated as a prepositional phrase and placed after the main clause. This approach aligns with the linguistic habits of readers, enhancing their understanding of the original text.

#### Example 4

**Source text:** 1932年12月25日，中共绥宁中心县委得知日军集结和向穆棱一带进犯的情报，县委书记潘庆由要求李延禄将部队拉出来，保住部队实力。

**Target text:** On December 25, 1932, the Suining Central County Committee of the CPC learned the intelligence which was the Japanese army's gathering and invasion of the Muling County area. Pan Qingyou, the secretary of the county party committee, requested Li Yanlu to lead the troops out of there to maintain their strength.

**Analysis:** Xu Siyi points out that the relationship between the clauses of run-on sentences is not labeled by related words, but is determined by the logical-semantic structure. (Xu Siyi, 2002:11) The original text is a run-on sentence composed of four short phrases, with two subjects, “中共绥宁中心县委” and “潘庆由”. They correspond to the verbs “得知” and “要求” respectively. Therefore, it can be concluded that Example 4 conforms to the linguistic characteristics of a run-on sentence with multi-subject. The translator applies the adaptation method under the Translation Variation Theory to translating, which includes such translation means as splitting the sentence adjusting the order, and interpreting the words. Firstly, the source text can be divided into two clusters in terms of content, the first and second clauses are one cluster with the subject of “中共绥宁中心县委”, and the third and last clause is a separate cluster with the subject of “潘庆由”. To avoid logical confusion, the translator divides it into two separate sentences.

Secondly, the translator adjusts the order of the sentences to avoid being top-heavy and puts the temporal clause at the beginning of the sentence when translating the sentence with “中共绥宁中心县委” as the subject. Then, the translator translates the phrase “日军集结和向穆棱一带进犯” into a non-restrictive relative clause introduced by “which” and performs postposition. When translating the sentence with “潘庆由” as the subject, the “县委书记” is selected as a parenthesis between the subject and the predicate. Finally, the Chinese verb “拉” in the phrase “要求李延禄将部队拉出来” carries the meaning of “leading the troops out”. The translator opts not to translate it directly as “pull” but instead uses a dynamic equivalence approach, rendering it as “lead the troops out of there”. This choice aims to bring out the implicit meaning, enabling readers to grasp and understand the authentic information the author intends to convey, in line with the requirements of both the source and target languages.

## 4. Conclusion

In *Evolution and Ethics-Explanatory Notes*, Yan Fu exclaims that translation is threefold in difficulty: faithfulness, expressiveness, and elegance. Only when translators immerse themselves in the actual process of translation do they comprehend the genuine difficulty of meeting these three standards. Translation is far more than a simple process of linguistic code conversion. It serves as a bridge for communication across different cultures. During the translation process, the translator refers to relevant literature on Chinese run-on sentences and uses paper dictionaries, and electronic dictionaries to ensure the quality and reliability of their work.

The high frequency and large quantity of run-on sentences in Chinese discourse make them one of the more distinctive sentence representation methods in Chinese, largely reflecting the essential characteristics of the language. Studying the English translation of Chinese run-on sentences not only enhances the authenticity and readability of English translations but also helps explain the basic rules of transforming complex sentence structures between Chinese and English. Therefore, it holds significant practical significance for English-Chinese translation practice and the translation of Chinese culture. Given the specificity of

Chinese run-on sentences and the complexity of their classification, this paper summarizes more run-on sentence phenomena with a limited number of sentence types. Through the induction and summary of typical examples, the translator proposes that subject identification is the main criterion for classifying the structure types of run-on sentences.

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