



The Great Gatsby: A Contrastive Study of Its Two Chinese Versions

Jinxing Ma & Ning Wei

College English Department, Guizhou University, Guiyang 550003, China

E-mail: fljxma@126.com

Abstract

This paper, based on theories of Contrastive Linguistics deals with the contrastive study concerning two Chinese versions of the *Great Gatsby* rendered respectively by Wu Ran, and Wu Ningkun et al from the following two perspectives: differences on lexicon and syntax. Through a systematic comparison and contrast, the writer suggests that we should apply contrastive studies of English and Chinese in our TEFL practice to enhance teaching efficiency.

Keywords: Contrastive linguistics, Lexicon, Syntactical contrast, TEFL

1. Introduction

Published in 1925, *The Great Gatsby*, the finest novel written by F. Scott Fitzgerald, is surely one of the classics of modern American literature. The story is told in the first person by Nick Carraway. Nick's house is next to an extravagant and vulgar mansion owned by the mysterious but fabulously wealthy Jay Gatsby, about whom all rumors pass from mouth to mouth.

"Gatsby's real name is James Gats and he was a poor boy from the west. When he was an army officer he had fallen love with Daisy, who was charming and polished in her social manners but whose "voice is full of money". Daisy later married Tom Buchanan, a wealthy young Midwesterner who has recently come east and a hard arrogant man. And Gatsby became rich through bootlegging and other criminal activities with the help of a corrupt elderly Jewish millionaire, Dan Cody. Gatsby, however never stopped loving Daisy and has taken the house in West Egg to be near her. Through Dick, Daisy's cousin, he finds a way to meet her again and arranges fabulous entertainment to gain her favor until he is overjoyed to feel that he has Daisy back again. Her husband has a shady affair with Myrtle Wilson, the loose and sensual wife of a garage man. When Wilson has finally become suspicious of her fidelity and has begun to bully her, in panic she runs out into the highway, and under the wheels of the car in which Daisy is driving. Gatsby manages to protect Daisy, and Tom, with whom she effects a reconciliation, inflicts the bloodiest revenge upon her lover by telling Wilson that it was Gatsby who killed his wife and where to find him. Wilson shoots off Gatsby and then himself. The only person to go to the funeral besides Nick is Gatsby's father, Henry Gatz, who arrives from Minnesota, for all of Gatsby's acquaintances desert him the party guests vanish".(Hu, Yintong et al, 1999:369-370)

The novel analyzed in this paper was published by Charles Scribner's Sons New York in 1953 while the two Chinese versions "le bu qi de gai ci bi" analyzed in the paper are rendered respectively by Wu Ran (Wu₁ for short), and Wu Ningkun et al (Wu₂ for short). Both of these two versions were printed in 1998.

2. Contrastive analysis of lexicon

A considerable number of differences exist between Chinese and English as they are two totally different language families. i.e. the former belongs to Indo-European family while the latter is Sino- Tibetan family. Each of the language has developed its own features during the course of its development in lexicons. Among all these miscellaneous features, lexical differences are one of the most striking phenomena that deserves our attention.

"Meaning" is the association of language symbols with the real world. In 1981 G. Leech categorized seven kinds of meanings of among which collocative meaning refers to the communication through association with words which tend to occur in the environment of another word (Hu et al, 1989: 144). For the sake of analysis, this section will confine its discussion to differences in collocative meaning that includes tautology and zeugma.

2.1 Tautology

Tautology, as a language phenomenon is universally prevalent in Chinese for the aim of semantic emphasis. Such as the wording of "bu bi yao de lang fei, jie bu kai de si jie, wei kai fa de chu nu di" et al is commonly used in Chinese written text. In contrast, such language phenomena are considered redundant like "the actual fact, merge together, the unexpected surprise". Given the point, translation from English to Chinese should be aware of this difference to ensure

the full transmission of the original work. Examples are shown as follows:

Ex1. And so with the sunshine and the great bursts of leaves growing on the trees, just as things grow in fast movies, I had that familiar conviction that life was beginning over again with the summer (P4).

Wu₁: ban sui zhe yang guang, shu shang hen kuai zhang man le ye zi, ru tong kuai fang de dian ying zhong de dong xi yi ban jiu mao chu lai le, na zhong shu xi de que xin wu yi de dong xi zai wo de nao hai zhong chan sheng: sheng huo ru tong xia tian yi yang you yao kai shi le (P4).

Wu₂: yan kan yang guang ming mei, shu mu hu ran jian zhang man le ye zi, jiu xiang dian ying li de dong xi zhang de na me kuai, wo you chan sheng le na ge shu xi de xin nian, jue de sheng ming sui zhao xia tian de lai lin you chong xin kai shi le (P5).

From the above listing Chinese versions, it is not of great difficulty to see that the exploration of tautology “shu xi de xin nian” in Wu₂ translation sounds more natural and emphatic than that of Wu₁ while the absence of the wording strategy, comparatively speaking, does not leave readers’ any concept of semantic emphasis.

Ex 2. I couldn’t sleep all night; a fog-horn was groaning incessantly on the sound, and I tossed half-sick between grotesque reality and savage, frightening dreams. (P147)

Wu₁: wo yi ye wu fa ru shui; wu di sheng zai hai xia bu ting di wu wu jiao zhe, wo zai guai yan de xian shi he xiong can ke pa de meng huan zhi jian nian zhuan fan ce (P133).

Wu₂: wo zheng ye bu neng ru shui, yi ge wu di zai hai wan shang bu ting di wu wu xiang, wo hao xiang sheng bing yi yang zai zheng ning de xian shi yu ke pa de e meng zhi jian nian zhuan fan ce (P126)

In the version of Wu₁, the translator fails to take the phenomenon of tautology into account in Chinese written texts and achieves no artificial transmissions of the authentic work because “xiong can ke pa de meng huan” in terms of collocative meaning produces no better literary effects than “ke pa de e meng” amidst Chinese readers.

Ex 3. I followed him over a low whitewashed railroad fence, and we walked back a hundred yards along the road under Doctor Eckleburg’s persistent stare. (P24)

Wu₁: wo gen zhe ta fan guo shua you bai se tu liao de tie lu zha lan, zai ai ke er bo ge dai fu ning gu bu bian de zhu shi xia, wo yan zhe gong lu chao hui zou le yi bai ma (P22)

Wu₂: wo gen zhe ta kua guo yi pai shua de xue bai de di di de tie lu zha lan, ran hou yan zhe gong lu, zai ai ke er bao dai fu mu bu zhuan jing de zhu shi zhi xia, wang hui zou le yi bai ma. (P22)

Both of the two translators are professional enough to render the original work into the expression of tautology in the target language. Of course “mu bu zhuan jing de zhu shi”, generally speaking, seems more readable in harmony of Chinese readers’ appetite than “ning gu bu bian de zhu shi xia”

2.2 Zeugma

Zeugma, as a language phenomenon under collocative meaning is somewhat covert. When doing translation, we must conscientiously dig out the potential layers of meaning dominated by the core words in the texts, and appropriately convey different expressions of the corresponding words. Please see the following examples:

Ex1. He was now decently clothed in a short shirt, open at the neck, sneakers, and duck trousers of a nebulous hue. (P95)

Wu₁: ta zhe hui de chuan dai hai suan ti mian le, yun dong shan tang zhe ling kou, zu ta lu you xie, chuan yi tiao yan se mo hu de fan bu ku. (P85)

Wu₂: ta xian zai yi fu zheng qi yi xie le, chuan zhe yi jian tang ling de yun dong shan, yi shuang yun dong xie he yi tiao yan se bu qing bu chu de fan bu ku. (P82)

In this sentence the preposition “in” dominates the collocation of “shirt, sneakers and trousers”. In the first translation, the translator ponders upon the covert collective meanings of “in” plus “shirt sneakers and trousers”, and correspondingly renders it into three static verbs of “zu ta, chuan zhe”. However, the second translator misses the “zeugma” structure and generalizes the translation of ‘in’ by one character “chuan” in Chinese version.

Ex2. He had reached an age where death no longer has the quality of ghastly surprise, and when he looked around him for the first time and saw the height and splendor of the hall and the great rooms opening out from it into other rooms... (P168)

Wu₁: ta yi jing dao le si wang bu zai jue de da jing xiao guai de nian ling, ta zhe hui shi tou yi ci shang xia da liang zhe ta, kan zhe da ting de gao du yu hao hua, suo you da fang jian bi ci xiang tong bing dou lian zhe da ting..... (P152)

Wu₂: ta yi jing dao le bing bu ba si wang kan zhao yi jian hai ren ting wen de shi qing de nian ji, yu shi ci ke ta di yi ci xiang si zhou yi wang, kan jian men ting ru ci fu li tang huang, yi jian jian da wu zi cong zhe li you tong xiang bie de

wu zi.....(P144)

Similarly, the verb “see” has two layers of collocative meanings: the height of the hall and the splendor of the hall. Based on this analysis, Wu₁’s translation “kan jian da ting de gao du yu hao hua” properly meets the collocative meanings of the source language while Wu₂’s “kan jian men ting ru ci fu li tang huang” is ignorant of the collocation between “see” and “the height”.

Ex3. About two years later I remember the rest of that day, and that night and the next day, only as an endless drill of police and photographers and news paper men in and out of Gatsby’s front door.(P164)

Wu₁: liang nian zhi hou, wo hai ji de na tian qi ta shi jian, na yi wan shang he ci ri de qing jing, shu bu qing de he xun lian you su de jing cha, she ying shi he ji zhe zai gai ci bi jia da men kou chu chu jin jin.(P147)

Wu₂: shi ge liang nian, wo hui xiang qi na tian qi yu de shi jian, na yi wan yi ji di er tian, zhi ji de yi pi you yi pi de jing cha, she ying shi he xin wen ji zhe zai gai ci bi jia men kou lai lai wang wang .(P140)

With regard to the two translations of the above sentence, both of the two translators pay special attention to the use of zeugma structure and wholly put the original text into Chinese in light with the relationship between the dominating verb “remember” and “the rest of that day, that night and the next day”.

3. Syntactical Contrast

3.1 Hypotactic vs. Paratactic

One of the striking differences between Chinese and English sentences is the ways through which they are combined. By hypotactic, we mean “the dependent or subordinate construction or relationship of clauses with connectives” (The World Book Dictionary. Cited from Lian, 1993: 48) while paratactic refers to ‘the arranging of clauses one after the other without connectives showing the relation between them’ (ibid.). Compared with Chinese, English can be classified as a kind of formalized language whose clauses are shown by connectives while the relations between clauses in Chinese sentences are implied by logical sense or sequences of words. It is no wonder that some linguists claim that English is over cohesion-oriented and Chinese is covert cohesion-oriented. Examples are shown in the following:

Ex1. He didn’t say any more, but we’ve always been unusually communicative in a reserved way, and I understood that he meant a great deal more than that.(P1)

Wu₁: ta mei zai shuo bie de, bu guo wo men chang chang jiu shi yu zhong bu tong, yong mo qi de fang shi jiao tan, wo ming bai ta yi wei shen chang de hua yu .(P1)

Wu₂: ta mei zai shuo bie de, dan shi wo men fu zi zhi jian sui hua bu duo, que yi xiang shi fei chang tong qi de, yin ci wo ming bai ta de hua da you xian wai zhi yin.(P1)

As to the two translations, the first translator realizes the features of “paratactic” in Chinese sentences and make use of the inherent logical senses to express the translation. In contrast, the second translator neglects the very differences and add “sui, que, yin ci” in the translation.

Ex2. With an effort I managed to restrain my incredulous laughter. The very phrases were worn so threadbare that they evoked no image except that of a turbaned ‘Character’ leaking sawdust at every pore as he pursued a tiger through the Bois de Boulogne.(P66)

Wu₁: zhen shi hua ji tou le, wo jing liang ren zhu bu xiao, ta de hua ju ju dou shi na me fa wei, yi zhi yu chu le ke yi xiang xiang yi ge dai tou jing de “gau ren” zai bu long gong yuan zhui bu lao hu shi hun shen lou zhe mu xie wai, zai ying bu qi ren he xiang xiang .(P58)

Wu₂: wo hao bu rong yi cai ren zhu bu xiao, yin wei ta de hua ling ren nan yi zhi xin. Ta de cuo ci ben shen na me chen fu, yi zhi yu zai wo nao zi li zhi neng shi zhe yang de xing xiang: yi ge guo zhe tou jin kuai lei xi li de “jue se”, zai bu long gong yuan zhui da lao hu, yi mian pao, yi mian cong shen zi li mei ge kong dong li wang wai lou mu xie.(P56)

The first translator does not limit his expression to hypotactic relations in the original work while in the second translation, the translator are deeply influence by the connective “so...that”, and literally renders it into “yin wei ...yi zhi yu ...” in spite of the paratactic features in Chinese language.

Ex3. He was balancing himself on the dashboard of his car with that resourcefulness of movement that is so peculiarly American --- that comes. I suppose, with the absence of lifting work or rigid sitting in youth and even more, with the formless grace of our nervous, sporadic games.(P64)

Wu₁: ta yi fei chang mei guo hua de ji ling dong zuo, zai che de jiao ta ban shang, wen le wen zi ji ---zhi suo yi zhe yang, wo xiang, shi you yu nian qing shi que fa tai ju wu ping, huo zhe zong shi jiang ying di zuo zhe de yuan gu, jin er yan zhi, shi you yu wo men yi yu ji dong de, ling xing de yun dong que fa you mei zhi shi de yuan gu.(P57)

Wu₂: ta zhan zai ta che zi de dang ning ban shang, bao chi zhe shen ti de ping heng na zhong ling huo de dong zuo shi mei guo ren te you de ---wo xiang zhe shi you yu nian qing shi bug gan zhong huo de yuan gu, geng zhong yao de shi

you yu wo men ge zhong jin zhang ju lie de yun dong zao cheng zi shi zi ran er you mei.(P55)

Besides connectives such as who, that, but, or et al, some prepositions and prepositional phrases are well served to combine sentences in English but the formation of Chinese sentences are usually absent from ,or even omit prepositions and prepositional phrases. In this example, both translations are aware of the syntactical function of 'with' and respectively put it into the causal conjunction "you yu".

3.2 Static vs. Dynamic

Limited by the principle of subject-verb concord , English people use one verb only in a simple sentence or a clause, and the other verbs following the main verb should be nominalized or non-finite forms (such as gerunds, infinites). Then the description tends to be static, i.e, the priority of nouns over verbs. However, in Chinese there are no inflection forms and Chinese people get used to having the co-occurrences of many verbs, and the descriptions tend to be dynamic. For instance:

Ex1. "Whenever you feel like criticizing any one", he told me...(P1)

Wu₁: " wu lun ni xiang yao ze nan shen me ren de shi hou, " ta dui wo shuo...(P1)

Wu₂: " mei feng ni xiang yao pi ping ren he ren de shi hou, " ta dui wo shuo...(P1)

In the original English sentence the gerund "criticizing" is static but when rendered into Chinese, both translators have paid subtle attention to the difference and provide a "dynamic" verb with the version of "ze nan and pi ping" to better comply with typical formation of Chinese sentences .

Ex2. And, after boasting this way of my tolerance, I come to admission that it has a limit.(P2)

Wu₁: zai ru ci kua kou wo de kuai rong zhi hou, wo kai shi cheng ren kuan rong ye de you ge xian du .(P2)

Wu₂: zai zhe yang kua wo de kuan rong zhi hou, wo de cheng ren kuan rong ye de you ge xian du.(P3)

"Admission" is derived from the verb "admit". Being fully aware of the description with static characteristic in English, the two translators do a very good job in changing the "admission" into "dynamic" conveys of "cheng ren".

Ex3. About two years later I remember the rest of that day, and that night and the next day, only as an endless drill of police and photographers and news paper men in and out of Gatsby's front door.(P164)

Wu₁: liang nian zhi hou, wo hai ji de na tian qi ta shi jian , na yi wan he ci ri de qing jing , shu bu qing de he xun lian you su de jing cha, she ying shi he xin wen ji zhe zai gai ci bi jia da men kou jin jin chu chu.(P147)

Wu₂: shi ge liang nian, wo hui xiang qi na tian qi yu de shi jian , na yi tian wan shang yi ji di er tian, zhi ji de yi pi you yi pi de jing cha, she ying shi he ji zhe zai gai ci bi jia men kou lai lai wang wang .(P140)

English is rich in prepositions or prepositional phrases while the number of prepositions and prepositional phrases are relatively small. Therefore, the utilization of prepositions and prepositional phrases are typical of English sentences. During the process of E-C in the above example, the static "in and out of" are well transmitted into the dynamic "chu chu jin jin and lai lai wang wang" respectively.

4. Conclusion

English and Chinese, as two totally different language families share a great deal of differences, which deserves our incessant effort to explore. Based on the contrastive study as to the two Chinese versions of *the Great Gatsby*, it may be concluded that miscellaneous features of the two languages, to a big degree provide barriers to EFL learners. To better predict which aspect students are most likely to make errors, CA is of great significance in the improvements our TEFL. According to structuralism, foreign language teachers need place much emphasis on the contrastive analysis of sound systems, lexicons, semantic sense or even culture acquisition models so as to minimize the L1 interferences during a student's process of language output such as writing or interacting in the target language. Only with the concept of CA application in mind can we facilitate our English language in an efficient manner.

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